University of Alberta

Historicity, Truth, and the Possibility of Philosophy

by

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to explain and defend the notion of the historicity of philosophy in contrast to a view that holds the only fitting objective of philosophical inquiry to be eternal truths or truths that will hold true for all times and places. My approach to this problem is by way of a Heideggerian reading of the history of philosophy and our current existential situation. Through a discussion of Heideggerian truth-phenomena (being, disclosure, authenticity, death, responsibility) I respond to some of the objections that have been made against philosophy's historicity which claim that such a view is nihilistic, i.e., permits anything, effectively reducing philosophy to unfettered poetizing. I show that these objections are methodologically ill founded and argue that it is in fact *necessary* to recognize philosophy's historical 'fallenness' if the traditional aims and claims of philosophy are to be maintained.

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List of Abbreviations

(See bibliography for detailed citations of the works used)

References to works by Heidegger:

BT	*Being and Time*
GPP	*Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*
LH	"Letter on Humanism" in *Pathmarks*
PDT	"Plato's Doctrine of Truth" in *Pathmarks*
SZ	*Sein und Zeit*
W	*Wegmarken*

References to works by Fackenheim:

ARRA	"On the Actuality of the Rational and the Rationality of the Actual"
HTPT	The Historicity and Transcendence of Philosophic Truth
RD	The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought
TMW	To Mend the World

References to works by Rosen:

N	Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay
QoB	The Question of Being

§1. Introduction

The topic of this thesis is the confrontation between a view of philosophy oriented by a search for eternal truths, and one essentially characterized by historicity, by reliance on its own history. It is not so much a traditional scholarly study as an 'essay' (*essai*) in the original fundamental sense. I try to find a way through the issue at hand against the backdrop of my reading and study of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, but the end I aim at is not restricted to an assessment of Heidegger's text.

I begin the thesis by providing a rationale for the 'standard' determination of philosophical thinking as directed towards the achievement of eternal or historically transcendent truth. I discuss the dominance of this view and introduce Heidegger's project of understanding this determination of truth from a more original horizon. To further orientate the problem of philosophy and history I sketch a history of philosophy, showing the *prima facie* case for the historicity of philosophy. I then move on to a more detailed presentation of Heidegger's case for the historicity *and* transcendence of philosophic truth, situating the issue as a central 'philosophical' problem by referring to its origins in Plato's cave 'allegory.' In the light of this analysis, I introduce certain critical readings of Heidegger's project, and in particular of the effective negative results towards which it might be supposed to lead – loss of transcendence, an empty nihilistic silence, an abandonment to caprice, the permitting of everything. In response, I provide further explication of truth-phenomena and the being of Dasein, pointing out the phenomenal basis for the necessity of Heidegger's more original conception of the problematic, including its necessity in grounding the possibility of the kinds of criticism

discussed. As the criticisms suggest, however, establishing an authentic projection of truth in the face of the tension between different ways of understanding things – that which merely *is*, that which is 'rational,' that which *should* be the case – presents real difficulties. To understand these difficulties better, I explicate Heidegger's analysis of Dasein's modes of being (authentic/inauthentic thrown projecting) from which we develop our possibilities (our *existenziell* projects) and discuss the 'dangers' to be attended to, given this understanding. I then address the meaning and necessity of the phenomenon of *death* in making authentic, transcendent projection possible, followed by a discussion of *responsibility* as a basic phenomenon of the historical projecting of truth (in response to the alleged nihilistic indifference entailed by 'resolute openness'). This is followed by a clarification in response to a possible misunderstanding of the way in which Dasein is the object of its own responsibility. As a concluding response to the criticisms considered in the essay, I offer a neutralization of these criticisms through a clarification of the project-domain of fundamental ontology and its essential historicity. Finally, from the initial opposition between philosophy and history, I argue that *if* there is to be any possibility of pursuing a '*philosophia perennis*,' this must take place within an understanding cognizant of its own essential historicity.

§2. The Notion of Philosophical Thinking

Ordinarily our thinking is not explicitly self-reflective. At the risk of evoking an air of paradox, it might not be entirely without point to say that most thinking is not even 'thoughtful.' In any case, apart from common enough references in our thinking to other episodes of thought, as when we remember thinking something or try to stop ourselves from thinking about something, our thinking is usually not *about* our thinking, as such, but rather is focused on, indeed absorbed by, a world of 'things' (*Seiende*), all those pressing and most necessary objects of our consciousness – our jobs, tools, appetites, other people, God/gods, our 'empirical selves' (whether as psychological, historical, biological, etc.), and so on. The scientific pursuit of various fields of knowledge (*Wissenschaften*) – "history, nature, space, life, Dasein, language, and the like" (BT 29) – is likewise usually driven by the quest to make 'calculations' and accumulate 'results' about whatever things fall within their respective domains: to classify these hierarchically, to arrange them sequentially, to determine their causal relations, and so on – to put them at our disposal in terms of some set of well-ordered concepts. But each instance of our everyday preoccupation with these things is imbued in advance with significance by the pre-existing (*vorläufig* – 'runn'ng-in-advance') structure of the world-as-a-whole, which always forms, or at least *informs*, the implicit context of our understanding. It is in the light of this pre-structuring that the 'things' that are, appear to us precisely as they do. An understanding of the *way* in which things in the world appear to us in a meaningful way, as having various roles which they fill in the world and in our lives, and not just an understanding of the *fact* of their appearing, constitutes an

ontological (or at least pre-ontological) understanding, an understanding of what *is* and what it is to *be*. The notion of an ontology, then, an understanding of the being of beings in general, is recognizable as the necessary condition of every understanding of everything, even that understanding which is least 'thoughtful.' Nonetheless, this notion is rarely brought to light as a problem, a subject for investigation, in its own right.

That the generalized question of *what* is and *how* it is, a search for the fundamental modes of being-in-general, does arise, is a matter of *historical* occurrence – the beginnings of which we usually trace back to the ancient Greeks – and the shape of the ensuing problematic of Being (its development – *Entwicklung*), it seems, cannot but involve an entanglement (*Verwicklung*) with non-rational, historical matters of 'mere' fact. The fact that philosophy is not something just up in the heavens, but has a thoroughly historical biography that includes both an approximate date of birth and various anticipations (or allegations) of its death, might well be interpreted such that philosophy ought to be taken merely as a *part* of history. On this view, the most genuine knowledge of philosophy would be had by virtue of a contentedly pluralistic charting of its historical course. And so we may come, at least in a vague way, to "l'idée de l'identité de la philosophie et de l'histoire" – the idea of the identity of philosophy and history. (Ricoeur 22).

One way of developing this view is to claim that there appears in each period of history a characteristic – and characteristically 'philosophical' – way of looking at things (a *Weltanschauung*). These *Weltanschauungen*, which historical study shows to be ever arising and passing away (whether unpredictably or in accord with some kind of meaningful development), set the bounds (*Grenzen*) of that which can be known (in a

manner, certainly, which remains to be precisely explicated). Each *Weltanschauung* bounds the understanding of an epoch, however, only as a rule and for the time being, for as long as its period of hegemony lasts; and how long that will be can only be determined retrospectively, by the historian who can evaluate objectively, from an intellectual distance, as an observer whose understanding is no longer an immanently constitutive element of its object of study, that is, only after the *Weltanschauung* that one wishes to study has become passé and has been replaced by a new dominant view of the world. Of course, there certainly seems to be, besides historical distance, more than one way in which people stand at a distance from the dominant way of viewing the world. As specifically characterized by *finite* 'permanence,' the appearing of beings in accord with the prevailing *Weltanschauung* cannot be expected hold sway categorically, at the expense of every other possibility of thinking and being. But in general, it is the burden of the non-historian philosopher to remember that he cannot simply transpose the understanding inherent to his *Weltanschauung* to an evaluation of other *Weltanschauungen*. Given this view of metaphysical thinking it may appear, on the one hand, that the truths of each epoch are all equally groundless, that none of them can rightly be counted as correct in the sense of conforming to what really is the case; or, on the other, that the truths of each epoch are all equally true, insofar as they all contribute to the development of Spirit which occurs essentially in each age, in a way that is proper to and appropriate for each age.

Either way, such claims about the nature of truth appear to pose a problem for metaphysical thinking, since metaphysics seeks to address the question of *what is* precisely in a way that transcends a merely historical understanding of transitory things,

to an understanding of the essential natures that underlie the events of history. This kind of understanding will hold good anywhere, anytime, making it possible for us to take a normative view of the essential possibilities of history and, in principle, to understand all that *has* happened, whatever the historical development of actual events, as capable of being gathered under the aegis of a single, integral, universally valid story (account, *logos*). To this end philosophy must seek to determine the credentials of what passes for knowledge, to examine our most fundamental knowledge claims and the methodology by which we develop and evaluate all kinds of claims. In doing so, philosophy has sought to discover truths that are transcendent, that can be viewed without lingering suspicion as to their validity and that need not be continually tested against the changing realities of our lived, historical experience. Although the demand for such truths has arisen only in a concrete historical epoch, once the search for universal truth (certainty, verifiability, etc.) has been established as a problematic, the business of accordingly establishing the truth *in these terms*, comes to dominate thinking and to be effectively inescapable. It comes to be generally recognized as a matter of great importance that thought should find a resting place that is secure, that is, one that has been appropriately secured, by the use of reason, beyond any susceptibility to historical contingency (and this aim is generally presupposed too, by thinkers who resort to skepticism, to the claim that we cannot really know anything). This insistent demand for what is stable, and everlastingly so, tends to stifle any possible tendency to question the fundamental ontological starting point of our thinking, that is, the basic way in which we gather and let be seen (λεγειν) that which appears (τα φαινομενα - cf. SZ §7). The possibility of working out ontological alternatives that could engender desiderata other than rational consistency, or a stable

correspondence of *thoughts* (or *propositions/ propositional content*) to *things*, the goals which have come to be commonly presupposed as *the* self-evident requirements of rigorous thinking, is covered over.

The situation of modern thinking addressed by Heidegger's *Being and Time* is one that, in its historical provenance, has long been essentially determined by the domination of this kind of reason.[1] While the demand may no longer be heard for the ahistorical in terms of the ever-lasting, that which transcends all time(s), the same 'metaphysical' determination of being is at work when reason tries to restrain itself from overreaching its own capabilities and restricts itself to 'practical' concerns: to determining and dealing with only those things, or only that aspect of things, which can be measured, controlled, produced, and put to use in addressing whatever is seen (perhaps 'self-evidently') to be needed in the current situation. In either case the *being* ('Being') of beings is determined, in some particular way, in advance and only *beings* are called into question and addressed by reason. This decision, made in advance, about the nature of being, pervades the basic orientation of thinking, sending it off to busily pursue beings (whether these are understood as the 'eternally true' or as the 'palpably useful'). So thinking, having already settled the question of being and having been assigned to other tasks, is closed off from the question of being. The question about being is forgotten, cast into oblivion, although it is only on the basis of this being, which thinking fails to put in question, that thinking is first assigned to inquire about beings in whatever way it does.

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[1] This is stated clearly in "Plato's Doctrine of Truth" where Heidegger claims that the understanding of Being that was first brought to rule by the Greeks (cf. SZ 225), "has entered upon its unconditioned fulfillment. …This change in the essence of truth is present as the all-dominating fundamental reality – long established and thus still in place – of the ever-advancing world history of the planet in this most modern of modern times" (Pathmarks 181-2).

The predetermination of 'reason' as metaphysical or logical dominates this thinking of beings. Even where thinking is *un*reasonable, reason remains decisive as a demand; the imperative to 'be reasonable' retains a kind of *categorical* force, even though the source of this demand and what it entails have not been thought through. Thus, when it comes to interpreting the meaning of being – that being which precedes and transcends 'reason' - the prevailing criteria of rational truth are brought to bear and the question itself is dismissed as unreasonable, an attempt to undermine 'reason' (or 'logic' – cf. LH 263). The task Heidegger broaches in *Being and Time* is nonetheless that of working out a more original horizon for the question about the meaning of Being, one that allows the primordial question to be heard, to be retrieved from the oblivion which he claims has been its lot throughout the history of western philosophy. His investigation hardly aims to be unreasonable, but it does seek to put in question the usual 'reasonable' presuppositions of philosophical thinking, in particular those relating to the subject matter proper to philosophical inquiry: is philosophy properly understood when thought of as the attempt to master in understanding the beings treated in the various branches of philosophy; or is the true task of philosophical thinking to stay with the question of Being as such, to dwell within the mystery of the coming-to-presence of historical-questioning-understanding-being?

Whereas, historically, philosophical problems have tended to appear 'perennially,' 'ready-made,' as it were,[2] in such a way that it is natural to attempt to solve them straight off, or, when this proves difficult, to dissolve them as unreasonable, in order for these attempted solutions to be meaningful, an adequate preparation of one's

[2] Including when the 'problems' that are passed along from one generation to the next are pseudo-questions – "Scheinfragen, die sich oft Generationen hindurch als »Probleme« breitmachen" (SZ 28).

horizon of understanding is necessary so that what is essentially at stake, what needs to be seen as problematic in a 'ready-made' problem, appears. That a more original, more fitting approach to the questions about the meaning of philosophy and the meaning of Being may be possible becomes clear enough if we reflect on the historical origins of the question: Without being *un*reasonable we can see that the predominating role of a particular kind of questioning so as to determine *what is* (beings and their being), a questioning that takes its cue from an average, everyday conception of 'reason,' poses questions in such a way so as to presuppose the validity of certain kinds of answers. Such predominance, with its *historical* provenance, must be understood as a particular disclosure of being, and this disclosure is in turn only understood by understanding what has been essential in the coming to pass of its historical appearing (and domination).[3] The task of *Being and Time* is to carefully work out these primordial structures of understanding, structures of *that* being (*Seiende*) (the being that we *are* [i.e., *Dasein*]) whose *way* of Being is to understand Being, *whose* Being *is* as an opening *of* Being itself. This is precisely the being/Being through which the *question* of Being has been decisively determined since the beginning of the history of the West[4] and from which has grown our current everyday way of ordering and accrediting various domains of knowledge.

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[3] Modern reason, for example, tends to take for granted the legitimacy of knowledge of a certain objectively verifiable sort. With respect to any general claim to *knowledge*, we require a demonstration of the claim's 'scientific' pedigree. But it is clear, *on reflection*, that such a demand is usually made *without* any real reflection, and that the bare fact that such a demand is made in these "most modern of modern times" (PDT 182) does not vindicate its legitimacy.

[4] This being so, even if this determination has largely *been*: as a matter that is forgotten.

§3. Orientation of our problem in and through the history of philosophy

In claiming to discern in the history of western philosophy (in particular in its modern culmination) the way in which, from out of this history, it comes to light that thinking has been assigned to some particular task (i.e., a re-awakening of the question of being), we of course must have from the start some idea of what is essential in the history of philosophy. An answer to the question of whether this understanding of the *history* of philosophy is essential to understanding *philosophy* as such can only be developed on the basis of a preliminary understanding, not only of philosophy itself, but also of its history (allowing, at least provisionally, that we are warranted in speaking of such a dichotomy). Having begun, then, by indicating what constitutes an ordinary understanding of philosophy, I will continue, by way of introduction, with an historical sketch of certain 'essential' moments in the unfolding of that history. This seems useful here, at least for myself, as a means of trying to first indicate the kind of grounding in the *res gestae* of philosophy's history (i.e., this history seen from a doxographical perspective) from which I hope to prepare the way for an appropriation of what is essential,[5] both in this history, and, thence, in the particular questions that will follow here (in this thesis).

The history of western philosophy begins with the ancient Greeks. The Greeks took for granted that the matter aimed at by philosophical thinking was eternal. In his *Grundfragen der Philosophie*, Gerhard Krüger, echoes this view:

[5] I.e., that from which a particular determination comes to pass of the gathering (λογος) of the appearing (φαινεσθαι) of beings (οντα).

> But man cannot be man, without some kind of eternity, wherever it is that he may seek it. That is the problem that history, i.e., the changeableness of human life, gives us: what endures in life? What is man that he is so changeable, and is yet found, so directed towards what is lasting? What is it that actually changes as history runs its course? From where do such changes endlessly come? What meaning do they have? [6]

According to the Greeks, man has, by nature, the capacity to transcend his contingent involvement in history and to come to a knowledge of the eternally true essences from which historical entities derive their being. Truth was something to be immediately encountered in its eternal appearing. That which was subject to change was the subject matter of history, but only the *changeless* constituted the proper subject matter of philosophical knowledge (or *wisdom*). Admittedly the 'historical career' of philosophical truths in Greek society was an important matter: the truth would often be concealed, whether forgotten or neglected, and so, disastrously, would fail to serve its function in the directing the life of the individual or state toward 'the good.' But the purpose of philosophy as such could remain unchanged: to (re)awaken a remembrance of the eternally true and to restore or inaugurate, for the first time or in a more definitive [*endgültig*] manner, the living reality of those truths.

With the rise of Christianity in the midst of the Greek cultural inheritance there arose also the awareness of history as an essential determinant of the knowable, and as an

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[6] "Der Mensch aber kann nicht Mensch sein, ohne irgend eine Ewigkeit, wo immer er sie suchen mag. Das ist das Problem, welches uns die Geschichte, d. h. die Wandelbarkeit des menschlichen Lebens aufgibt: was bleibt im Leben?, was ist der Mensch, daß er so wandelbar und doch so auf Dauer angewiesen ist?, was verändert sich eigentlich, wenn Geschichte geschieht?, woher kommen immer wieder solche Veränderungen?, welchen Sinn haben sie?" (Krüger 10)

essential object of knowledge in its own right. That wherein the Christian gained access to the hope of eternal life – the crucifixion and resurrection of the Christ – was an *historical* event with *universal* significance, attested to by eye-witnesses and consciously passed on as a unique historical event that occurred in the most literal flesh-and-blood sense. The extraordinary events constituting the Christian Messiah's human life were explained by the view that this life was also fully divine; thus history and eternity, the finite and the infinite, had been mysteriously, 'gratuitously,' united in their very substance, and the way to a like union (of history and eternity in *us*) had been provided for human beings. This uniting of human and divine had been accomplished first in Christ, that is, in the divine, by a free initiative of the divine, and then in the Christian believer, through the grace offered by Christ's mediation. In Christianity's Jewish roots there was of course already the view that God had manifested himself at distinct points in history and that the history of his chosen people was by no means a matter of secondary importance. But it was especially following the historical fulfillment (through Christ) of Israel's messianic prophecies, and the more widespread dissemination of messianic (i.e., Christian) faith to men who had been intellectually formed by the Hellenistic culture, that there was called forth a serious reflection on the relation of 'pagan' philosophy to divine revelation; the bridging of the gap between man and God, on the one hand, as initiated by man (i.e., by philosophy), and on the other, as initiated by God (i.e., prophets/the messiah). In this situation, human reason could still be viewed as a participation in the eternal *logos*, but at the same time man and his reason had fallen from an original state of grace, had been compromised by sin and ignorance, such that the soul's fundamental orientation towards goodness and truth was constantly in tension with man's desire to

hide from God in fear and shame, to cut himself off from the truth, from fellowship *in truth* with God and fellow-man, and to remain in bondage, instead, to his own foolish pride, fleshly passions, and lust for power.

In spite of this apparent tension, Christian philosophers (or philosopher Christians) attempted to harmonize, reconcile, synthesize, the findings of autonomous philosophical reflection and those of the revealed teachings of the Christian church. But it appears, *prima facie*, given the traditional Christian teaching on original sin,[7] or the 'fallenness' of man, that the purely autonomous use of human reason is more or less fore-doomed to go astray, and therefore must acknowledge its need to submit to correction should its course go astray and its conclusions contradict those given by the light of revealed truth. The very nature, however, of the speculative development of Greek thought, of philosophy, was to be a purely autonomous projection of human reason, and therefore, it seems, one that could not be subject to correction in this manner, by an external authority, an externally revealed truth.[8] Nonetheless, the issues raised by the Christian doctrine of original sin, its weakening of the will, disordering of the passions, and darkening of the intellect, once raised cannot be simply dismissed by a professedly autonomous reason. In order to be *autonomous*, reason must not submit to external authority; in order to be *reason*, it cannot dismiss what is proposed by external authority

[7] And prescinding here from consideration of the Hegelian view, whereby the serpent does not lie and the fall is in fact the first step towards man becoming like God (cf. Gen. 3:5).

[8] This is not to suggest that faith and philosophy (faith and reason) should be viewed as two competing sources of knowledge claims. Inasmuch as faith may have some role in instructing reason, this should be in order to enlighten reason/free reason for an engagement with higher truths, rather than to overpower it; while on the other hand, reason may be supposed to enlighten faith inasmuch as it is *fides quaerens intellectum*. If faith were viewed as an instrument for overpowering reason, this would be a decidedly dubious kind of faith, and the converse would also be true – "it was not by dialectic that it pleased God to save His people; 'for the kingdom of God consists in simplicity of faith, not in wordy contention'" (Saint Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, Book I, par. 42; cf. 1 Cor. 1:21 ff.). This is particularly true where faith is understood to be 'theological' and is supposed to be the fruit of a grace which restores, or perfects, human nature, including human reason (an essential part of man's nature as the *imago Dei*), rather than in a certain sense obliterating it.

for the sole reason that it comes from an external source. Autonomous reason is forced into a renewed reflection on the warrant for its own claim to pronounce truth.

This kind of critical self-examination was not a discovery of the Christian era. The Greek skeptics, for example, *using* reason, had already declared the impossibility of determining a criterion of the true by the use of reason. Thus, for example, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's summary of one of the Pyrrhonist skeptics' key arguments, one that expresses "*la skepsis même*," runs thus:

> There is disagreement between those who say that there is a criterion of the true, and those who deny it. If this disagreement cannot be resolved, it is necessary to suspend our judgment with regard to the true. If it is to be resolved, we require a criterion by which to resolve it; but in order to have this criterion, the disagreement would need to have already been resolved.[9]

But with the notion of original sin or 'the fall,' which has affected all humans, the direction from which reason is called into question is no longer merely on the basis of its own formal (rational) structure. Instead, the fact of its always being exercised by a finite, fallen subject is brought to the fore – reason must reckon with the possibility that its own essence is infected with what is particular and historical. Now, even if the skeptic's formal objections to reason's suitability as an instrument for discovering truth can be answered – even if they are negatively answered, by *surrendering* to the force of these objections – the question remains, in what sense do our responses to these difficulties

[9] "Il y a désaccord entre ceux qui disent qu'il y a un critère du vrai, et ceux qui le nient; si ce désaccord ne peut être tranché, il faudra bien suspendre son jugement quant au vrai; s'il doit être tranché, il faut pour cela un critère, et pour avoir ce critère, il faut avoir tranché le désaccord" (Nancy 24).

depend on the fallen nature of the reasoning subject, specifically *qua* fallen, and not merely on its enlightenment by the very appearing of the truth itself.

Descartes – at that time in history when mathematical thinking was gaining ascendancy as *the* way in which to study and understand nature – responded to this quandary of reason by a definitive subjectivizing of the truth, at least insofar as it is apprehended by reason: only that which appears to the *subject* as clear and distinct *object*, only that which can be *made* to appear and mastered in its appearing, in the manner of mathematical objects, 'geometrical' proofs, can be judged to be true or to pertain to what is real. Descartes' subject is still very much finite and prone to error, but Descartes seeks to overcome the skeptical worries that arise, both from reason itself, and from the Fall, by determining the limits of what can be rationally doubted, and thus seeking to establish extreme doubt as the guardian of knowledge. So, he argues: whatever is not possible for me to doubt, *is* just that, *impossible* for me to doubt, and so must be believed. There are some things which *are* in fact impossible for me to doubt (taught to me by 'the light of nature'), which therefore I must believe. But doubt and belief are modes of thought, that is, determinations of thinking substance (*res cogitans*), about which we are inclined to make certain judgments, and one of the things that appears to be indubitable is that our powers of judgment are finite and fallible. Thus it seems that the claim that there *are* indubitable claims, that I *must* believe, is the result of a fallible judgment – which, for all its inescapable *fallibility*, remains a subjectively *indubitable* claim that I must believe. And so what I come to believe in this rigorous fashion is objectively certain in the sense that it is certainly true with respect to the object of my thought, since any appeal beyond this mode of autonomous determination, determined as rigorous by, and in terms of,

thought thinking itself, more or less clearly and distinctly, is impossible. Given this determination of the method of doubt as the most rigorous path to knowledge (for an autonomous 'thinking thing' like man), were there to be a higher court of appeal than this one, it would have to be the case that our very faculty of knowing was defective, and that its creator was a deceiver; in which case grace and faith would likewise be of no avail and our search for certain knowledge would be doomed.

As it is, one of the things we cannot doubt and so must believe, when we think the matter through carefully, is that God does exist and that he is no deceiver. The same light of reason which secures for me an indubitable knowledge of my own nature reveals to me that the idea of God – an *infinite, perfect* being – is in fact prior to that of myself – a *finite, imperfect* being. I can know my own *im*perfection with certainty only insofar as I have a prior idea of a perfection that exceeds it, and the *objective* reality of this latter idea must come from a corresponding *formally* existing reality, the Divinity itself, and not from myself, a being who lacks this formal reality. Thus, relying on God's veracity, we have good reason to believe also those things, which we are constantly, though *not* indubitably, *inclined* by nature to believe – so: that thought, in thinking itself, is also related to a world of externally (*formally*) existing things resembling its thoughts, things that are not merely its thoughts, modes of its *own* thinking substance, but *are substantially*, are *in themselves*. Hence, Descartes understands that thought and beings essentially *belong together* and that the fact of their doing so is taught us by the natural light of reason. However, all beings *are* in one of two modes of being (one of two categories of substance): *res cogitans*: simple, unextended, *thinking* (feeling, perceiving, reasoning, willing, etc.) substance; or *res extensa*: *extended* substance having length,

width, depth, figure, and location; and this fact about being is determined by thought thinking itself, and, doing so, identifying beings and their modes of being, in accordance with what is apprehended as indubitable by its own (still finite and fallible) thinking. Thus what is most knowable in thought (to us) is interpreted as the most real in being (in itself); and that the natures of beings (of substances) can be determined in this way can be guaranteed in reliance on God himself, who, eternal, perfect, and unchanging, is certainly not a deceiver.

What is evident in all this, however, is that our grasp of the truth remains fallible and any certainty we have regarding what is true *must be relative to our subjective capacity for judging*. We are warranted in relying upon the divine veracity, it is true, but only on the condition that our exercise of reason self-consciously constrains itself to work within its proper limits: insofar as its ideas are clear and distinct. Berkeley pursues the logic of this position to its 'demonstrable' conclusion: by our very nature we spirits (thinking things) cannot perceive anything *but* ideas (unthinking things). All of our knowledge originates in perception, so to claim that something exists unperceived ('outside' the range of perception) can only be a groundless conjecture. Therefore, *esse est percipi*, to be is to be perceived – provided, at least, that our words are to have any assignable meaning.

It is then a short step to Kant's 'Copernican revolution': instead of the subject's understanding being conformed to the object, the object must appear in conformity to the subject's capacity for representing it. The subject is not simply presented with an object that is *other* than itself; instead the subject, as a thinking thing, is directly presented with (i.e., conscious of) its own thoughts, i.e., it is presented with modifications of itself, not

with other substances, other things, in themselves. So despite the belonging together, in some fashion, of thoughts and things, and because of (as well as *despite*) God's lack of intent to deceive us, it is clear that our thoughts *of* things cannot be simply identical with things *in themselves*, that are '*outside*' of *ourselves*. Insofar as things appear to us, they can do so only in accordance with our finite capacity for understanding, and the truth about this capacity (a capacity which constitutes the *condition of the possibility* of anything else appearing, including the dichotomous appearing of 'truth' *or* 'deceptiveness'), i.e., the transcendental or ontological truth, itself appears least/last of all. Furthermore, insofar as things do appear, we subjects (knowers, scientists) are not merely passive spectators at the theatre, but help to direct the play, helping to call forth the objects that appear, directing which experiments are to be performed, co-determining a range of results/phenomena to which we will be sensible. Following through with the line of thinking started by Descartes, then, we come clearly and distinctly to perceive the 'transcendental' nature of our understanding, as a finite (limited) enabling of the appearing of beings. This being the case, even if our representations of things in thought cannot be counted as presentations of the 'things in themselves,' it would not follow that God is a deceiver, since by carefully exercising the powers of reason given us by God, we are able to *see through* our natural inclination to think that we do simply perceive things themselves, rather than our thoughts.

But, reflecting on our 'fallen' nature, fallen, if not in the Christian sense, at least into some particular historical situation (including some particular story [history] about our historical situation), it becomes clear that our reasoning is not necessarily equipped *a priori* with its particular limited capacities for standing-out into being, equipped, that is,

by some eternally constant set of subjective powers and categories of understanding, as understood by Kant. While, perhaps, God could have given human understanding this kind of transcendent essential constitution, this mere *possibility* doesn't show that it *was* the wisdom of his good pleasure to do so. In at least some sense, it appears that the powers and categories of our understanding are themselves constituted and limited only in the particularity of the unfolding of our own history. At the end of such a philosophical reflection on the history of philosophy, then, we can conclude only that what *is* with regards to our thinking on the matter of philosophy and its history (and, perhaps, more broadly), is not an eternal thought, but our thought thinking itself from out of its own history… What our thought is, at least what it has been here, is an attempt to stand-out in, dwell in, be receptive towards, the history of philosophy. In the course of this history, philosophy enters into a confrontation with history, which at first had been left unthought. As a result, philosophy can no longer simply set history aside as external to its essential concerns. What is most evident in this history certainly doesn't appear to be what is *eternal* or changeless. Instead of the *eternal*, we find the perennial *search* for the eternal or changeless, which we noted at the outset.

What has been the warrant for this *a priori* human demand for eternity or the fruit of its historical evolution has not been made clear. Faith may remain an intact possibility for the attainment of eternity; but what has become of philosophy, of reason (including those manifestations which seek to be wed to faith)? Where the only assignable positive constitution of philosophy comes to light as an endless succession of questioning, it appears to have consumed itself by its own futility, its inability to achieve a stable consensus for any of its results (just as two thousand years ago the Greek skeptics

had said it must). Is the essential meaning of all this change, then, to be found only in the inevitability of change, the impossibility of grasping what is changeless within all the changes of history, the impossibility, as Heidegger claims, of transcending history?

At each stage in the 'history of philosophy' presented here, we do continue to ask about the truth and our knowledge of the truth: *what* do we know; what *are the limits* of what we know; what is it that *limits* our knowing; what does it *mean* to know, and specifically *for us* to know; how is our knowing *possible*? Our search for *the truth* is always tied to the truth about some being and we recognize that the being that we ourselves are has a preeminent place in our investigation, since the truth or the knowledge that we seek always in some way refers to this being: the search itself is an activity *of* this being and expresses a way of being that *belongs* specifically *to* this being – Dasein, a being that *is* in its *there*, with some kind of understanding. But what it means to be *there*, how our *there* has come to be – this *there* which constitutes the horizon within which all of our questions are asked and answered – is for the most part taken for granted. We certainly know that we are *there*, inescapably, *wherever* we are. Is the only sensible thing to do, then, to just accept that we are where we are, and cannot help but be, and move on to address more important orders of business? But of course determining what *is* truly important is itself a traditional philosophical task, and inasmuch as our thinking is fundamental to our meaningful dwelling in the world, thinking about '*where*' philosophy is, thinking about thinking, appears also to be of fundamental importance.

We can think about philosophy (and do so 'philosophically') only when our 'there' includes a particular kind of understanding: we know what philosophy is about, we have some notion of the problems of philosophy; but further, we also have some

notion about what has gone right and what has gone wrong in the historical treatment of these problems – we surpass the stage of merely being informed about, admiring of, or puzzled by, an historical gallery of profundities. In positing this condition of philosophizing, it is evident that what we are seeking is not *just* an understanding of historical philosophical problems in the *same* terms in which they were originally developed and understood. Such an understanding would only permit us to make the same judgments and come to the same conclusions. If we are to evaluate an approach that has been taken to resolving some philosophical problem, we are in need of the assurance that *our* horizon of understanding both *includes* and *transcends* that which has gone before – we must *understand,* before we can *evaluate,* someone else's thought. The requirement of such an assurance determines the nature of philosophical thinking: such thinking is never concerned with merely forward-looking progress, with overturning and discarding past opinions, but rather must always 'step back' in the determination to broaden the horizon of one's thinking, to open up rather than close off.

It is from *within* the horizon of an understanding of the history of philosophy that Heidegger seeks to take this step back, to uncover the primordial structures of our understanding, *through* which we are *able* to approach the metaphysical problems delivered by history. That is, he seeks to disclose our own Being in a more originary way, freed from any *a priori* concealment by 'metaphysical' conceptual baggage. This investigation is carried out by a being with a prior understanding of Being and this prior understanding must in some measure determine the direction or shape of the investigation that it undertakes and the conclusions at which it arrives. His investigation, though aiming to 'transcend' history, inevitably remains rooted *in* history – which may appear to

be a "fantastic undertaking"' (SZ 260). Thus there is at least a kind of formal circularity in Heidegger's investigation. He holds, however, that this kind of circularity, *hermeneutic* circularity, is not only not vicious (cf. SZ 7-8), but is transcendentally necessary in order to have any understanding whatsoever: understanding is made possible by historical *in-the-world* rootedness. Any claim by philosophical understanding to transcend its own historical situatedness is unsustainable. Accordingly, philosophy is essentially historical, that is, tied to the history of Being, a history that consists in the ongoing process/event of originary disclosure of the 'world,' of our horizon of consciousness. Our Being is always in-the-world, the world being constituted by our existing framework of understanding which first of all grounds the possibility of anything being intelligible, meaningful, or significant to us, *as* something. This *a priori* situatedness is essential to *all* of our understanding, which always consists in interpreting something that has already been interpreted (that is already, in one way or another, part of our world). It is possible for some *new* understanding to come to be, including Heidegger's, only in play with interpretations that have *already* been given (whether this play is positive or negative: taking inspiration from, developing, transcending existing interpretations, or misunderstanding or ignoring/being ignorant of them). As Charles Guignon puts it in his book *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*: "Metaphysics, like any human activity, is at its core a dialogue with the past" (Guignon 230).

Although it *is* supposed to be in some sense a *universal* claim about philosophical thinking, seeming thus to fit with the usual aims of philosophy, the claim Heidegger makes nonetheless seems to run counter to the self-understanding of philosophy as the science of ahistorical, unconditioned, absolute truths. And while

claiming to have a more primordial phenomenological origin than the *ratio* [reason] of traditional philosophy, the radical historicization of philosophy, the claim that philosophy cannot transcend history, at the same time *appears* to make a rational claim (on traditional terms). Further, this claim appears to be one that can easily be subjected to formal dialectical analysis and refutation: if it is not possible for philosophy to disclose *any* universal (historically unconditioned) truth, then it is not possible for philosophy to disclose *this* universal truth, namely: *that philosophy cannot legitimately claim to be able to discover universal truths*, that the human way of being and knowing is not a way that can lead to the grasping of any kind of unconditioned absolute, truth that is certainly true regardless of any changeable conditions, truth that gives access to that which is most 'truly true' [*τό αληθέστατον*].

But if the notions of truth and justification holding sway in traditional metaphysics and epistemology (as these have developed from their Platonic beginnings), rather than ineluctable categories of universal reason, can be seen as derivative from and dependent on a more primordial process/event of original disclosure that has been ignored, then Heidegger's analysis cannot be so easily swept aside. Instead philosophical thinking is forced into an eminently philosophical task, an examination of its own basic categories, including its exclusive methodological orientation towards autonomous verifiability as a warrant for positing beings [*Setzung von Seienden*] and their Being, and where the verification in question comes in a narrowly 'logical' or narrowly 'experimental' guise.

§4. Historicity *and* transcendence as perennial philosophical concerns

With the aim of working towards a better understanding of the problematic of historicity and its circularity, I will take as a 'dialogical' point of reference Emil Fackenheim's summary analysis (in "The Historicity and Transcendence of Philosophic Truth") of Heidegger's position and the problems that seem to arise for it. The first point in Fackenheim's summary states:

> "Philosophic thought must turn its back on the eternal truths of the *philosophia perennis*, and hence preface its quest for Being with an existential analysis of Dasein; this latter is historical, not *per accidens*, but in its essential constitution" (HTPT 86).

Insofar as the notion of a *philosophia perennis* is sustainable, the world to which our understanding is directed must be an *ordered* reality (a *kosmos*), the order of which is eternal (which is not to say *static*/eternally realized) and can be made manifest to reflective human reason. This belief should be supported by a broad consensus regarding the true nature of reality and human life across various traditions of thought, despite their having independent origins and diverse histories. The *philosophia perennis* must hold that there is a universal potentiality of the faculty of reason such that it is able to experience the order of the world on the basis of a direct experience of it and to understand this world – the object of our common experience – in terms that accurately reflect this order, approximating towards the eternal truth. The order displayed in the

universe, as reason divines, is produced by the totality of entities and their fixed laws of interaction. The essential properties (possibilities, tendencies, characteristics) of an entity (being) are defined by its nature or essence. Although individual beings (including philosophers and their philosophizing) follow a unique, historical course of existence, which, in a sense, is *not* the subject matter of eternal truth, the essential nature of the individual being, even if it is not *directly* knowable, is still a fixed point of reference determining its essential possibilities throughout the course of its existence, and can thus be grasped, at least to some extent, as that which is stable and knowable. As successive generations progress towards a correct grasp of these constant essential natures (or at least of their effects) and towards an understanding of the totality of such natures and their involvement with each other, it is possible for reason (i.e., the philosopher), given favorable historical conditions, to approach ever nearer to the eternal truth, which he knows in the act of *contemplatio*.

In the western philosophical tradition, Heidegger traces the origin of the notion of eternal truth back to the beginnings of metaphysical thinking found in Plato. He describes this originating event in "Plato's Doctrine of the Truth." In Plato's cave 'allegory,' people are chained up in the depths of a long cave such that they forced to constantly face the rear wall of the cave. Upon this wall are cast the shadows of wooden cutouts of various objects, which are being paraded in front of a fire. These prisoners have been thus chained for as long as they can remember and although, to be sure, they may be quite conversant in this domain of 'shadow-knowledge,' the reality of the shadows is *all* that they know. But if one of them should manage to loose himself, or should happen to *be* loosed, from his bonds, he will be able to turn away from the wall of the cave and can

then begin the journey towards the light (towards philosophic truth), gradually coming to see not just shadows, but the truest (αληθέστατον) objects. In turning away from the wall of the cave he sees the very objects, of which he had before known only shadows, and which had constituted the basis of his whole world of understanding. His gaining access to *truer* truths is only made possible by his *leaving behind* the world of the cave-wall – where mere shadows are mistaken for the sole (sun's) reality – and by eventually making the transition to the full light of day and a vision of the sun itself. To be sure, the philosopher does not just leave the cave behind as a thing of the past; he is impelled to return to help those who are still imprisoned there. But his return to the cave is a mission to bring about the enlightenment of the prisoners, to convince them that their truest end is to be found in leaving the cave behind.

What then is the significance of this 'allegory' for Heidegger's understanding of the subsequent course of the history of western thought? "What," Heidegger asks, "happens in these movements of passage [out of the cave, then back in]? What makes these events possible? From what do they derive their necessity? What issue is at stake in these passages?" (PDT 165)

Heidegger identifies the original sense of the Greek word that is standardly translated as truth, αλήθεια, as a privative notion: un-hiddenness.[10] This sense of the word, he claims, is still alive in Plato's day, as is evident from the allegory: it is clear that the prisoners still chained within the cave are privy to truth in this sense – the shadows

[10] The importance of this ancient etymology is not a matter of 'word-mysticism' [*Wortmystik*]. Instead, "ist es am Ende das Geschäft der Philosophie, die *Kraft der elementarsten Worte*, in denen sich das Dasein ausspricht, davor zu bewahren, daß sie durch den gemeinen Verstand zur Unverständlichkeit nivelliert werden, die ihrerseits als Quelle für Scheinprobleme fungiert" (SZ 220) [ultimately the concern of philosophy is to guard the *force of the most elemental words* in which Dasein expresses itself from becoming unintelligible expressions of 'common sense,' which then function as sources of pseudo-problems].

constitute for them an un-hidden world of truth. However, should one have his chains removed so that he is able to look around at the wooden figures and at the fire, or again, should he be led out of the cave into the light of day, the domain of truth, of what is unhidden, is at each stage transformed. The prisoners do have various levels of adeptness when it comes to identifying various shadows and making predictions about them and they are initially convinced that there is nothing more to reality than the shadows, even when a philosopher returns to the cave and tells them otherwise. But when a prisoner is released from his chains, he begins to undergo a process of παιδεία, of being e-ducated, of being led out, and at each stage of transition the entities that had previously been manifest to him are recognized as derivative from 'truer' realities. In the light of these 'truer' realities, the former are seen as pale imitations and the kind of seeing which views the lower realities as having ultimate significance in their own right, although it is natural and, at first, inevitable, comes to be seen as mistaken.

Thus the initial conception of truth at work here is un-hiddenness. But that something is un-hidden implies that its un-hiddenness is derived from hiddenness, making hiddenness the 'un-truth' (or *Ur*-truth) that is prior to, or equiprimordial with, truth as un-hiddenness. From this initial conception, however, the notion of truth which comes to the fore in the 'allegory,' though not without ambiguity, is one of seeing correctly (ορθώς) and the correctness of seeing is determined by its having been led to the right object. In this case it seems that 'objectively correct' seeing may be directed towards a merely transitory object, and so must yield a 'truth' that changes as the object changes. As Stanley Rosen explains in the course of his critique of Heidegger's ontology:

> The presented present [of the transitory object] has, as it were, no stable presence, nothing which speech could attribute or disclose. Instead, the attempt to attribute (κατηγορείν) stable properties to what is presented serves to conceal or distort it, to replace the possibility of being present by an ontic actuality. (N 98)

In the 'allegory,' then, the proper objective of the intellect cannot be a mere agglomeration of presented, momentary object perceptions, the multifarious items of which, though 'true' as long as they are present, are forever passing into nullity, along with our passing perceptions of them, but a transcending comprehension of the ideas making such objects intelligible, which is able to grasp the stable (eternal) source and destiny of the various transitory elements of reality as significant aspects of an overarching totality. And as Heidegger stresses, the means for accomplishing this, education – a turning around of the whole soul towards a steady view of the most true – becomes linked together with truth "into an original and essential unity" (PDT 167): what is 'truly' unhidden, originally determined from the being of beings, is now discovered only by transcending the realm of immediate appearances (everyday ideas) and turning one's gaze toward the idea of all ideas, that which first enables any appearing whatsoever. Thus truth becomes bound to the training of the human intellect and the correctness of ideas supersedes the truth of being.

Merely to identify a goal for philosophical understanding – the quest for a grasp of the eternal, or, more generally, of the most unchanging and most unhidden (most fully disclosed) source of all being, that is, a definitive normative framework for our

understanding – is to pose a question, not to have answered it; nor does posing the question indicate the methodology by which we should go about answering it or guarantee that any answers exist; or if there are answers, somewhere, that there is any methodology within our reach by which we could be assured of discovering them. The context in which Plato sets the problem of coming to know the αληθέστατον determines that knowing truly is a matter of correct seeing and that the achievement of this correct seeing is an arduous task requiring a readiness to relinquish our attachment to our nearest and most familiar 'world' – the world that first appears to us and to which our understanding is proximally and for the most part oriented – in favor of a world in which we will at first be dazzled and disoriented. As is also clear in Plato's 'allegory,' though, our (transitory) world is not simply foreign to, but is rather derived from, the (eternal) αληθέστατον – rather than casting us wholly into the unfamiliar, the process of παιδεία requires us to become attuned to seeing what was already partially familiar.[11] But, despite the apparent demand for the 'correct truth' which is illustrated in the cave 'allegory' and is "normative for the whole of Western thinking" (PDT 178), Heidegger's claim, as Fackenheim understands it, is that we cannot grasp the transcendent truth by rising "above Dasein [which *is* finitely and historically]. ... The [transcendent] existential analysis of *Dasein* must itself be a possibility of [finite, historical] *Dasein*" (HTPT 86).

The notion that we must *already* possess the basic understanding that is required to guide our *subsequent* ontological investigation, if any such investigation is to be

[11] We can recognize the modern form of this idea in the notion of 'scientifically rigorous' investigation that is supposed to lead to the most true explicit-ation of reality. For example, it is often thought that 'scientific' psychology is destined to reveal the 'real' objects (e.g., biochemical patterns) that underlie 'folk' psychological entities (e.g., beliefs).

possible, is key in *Sein und Zeit*. When we interpret the world, beings are always already familiar to us in our *Vorhabe* (fore-having). Our understanding of beings is rooted in the *Bewandtnisganzheit* (totality-of-involvement)[12] of our comportment towards beings, whereby we first 'have' them, in the most general sense. Our interpretation of what we thus 'have' is directed by a *Vorsicht*, a particular *pre*-view, of a beings place within the totality of our involvements. And, finally, this view is expressed conceptually, whether or not in a way that befits the being in question, "*je schon endgültig oder vorbehaltlich ... in einem* Vorgriff" – already, in each case, either conclusively or with reservations, in a fore-conception (SZ 150).

It is clear that these notions of *Vorhabe*, *Vorsicht*, and *Vorgriff* are also implicitly required in Plato's 'allegory,' making the passage out of the cave, and back in, as a process of '*re*-cognizing,' possible. These concepts are *ontological*, that is, they refer to our understanding-gathering of being. They result, and can *only* result,[13] from a phenomenal analysis of the structure of our understanding. But the guiding *Vorsicht* for Plato directs us towards a vision of the eternal natures underlying temporal things – that is, towards *objects* that are eternal. Why does Heidegger reject the search for these eternal truths in favor of an analysis of Being, the source, or ground, of the disclosedness, the coming to presence, of 'truths'?

There appear to be good methodological reasons for this rejection. The initial conception [*Vorgriff*] guiding our inquiry may be held either as conclusive, or only tentatively. In the absence of some special consideration, it seems that we ought to hold

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[12] I.e., the structural totality which pre-determines the significance of things in Dasein's environment in relation to a for-the-sake-of-which (*Worumwillen*) which belongs to Dasein's own being. (Cf. SZ 84)
[13] Cf. SZ 35: "*Ontologie ist nur als Phänomenologie möglich*" – ontology is only possible as phenomenology.

to the *starting* point of our inquiry, our *Vorgriff*, only tentatively – the point of philosophical inquiry (or of παιδεία), being to move *towards* a conception of the matter in question that can be accounted as having final validity [*Endgültigkeit*]. The prisoner in the cave cannot just take for granted that somewhere 'beyond,' there exists the light of day and the eternal source of illumination. Even if the prisoner has been told about the *truest* things that are outside the cave, has heard testimony about them from one who claims to have been there, there is no immediate assurance of the veracity of such testimony. Indeed, according to Plato, the message of the philosopher who returns to the cave is not welcomed; on the contrary, he exposes himself to ridicule and risks his life by testifying about the world beyond the cave. This point is made by Fackenheim in the context of his exposition of Hegel's thought:

> how could *any* individual … ascend the ladder to the absolute standpoint, handed him by a philosopher who himself is already – quite inexplicably – at that standpoint? He would have no choice but to assert his own standpoint *against* that of a thought making a pretense to absoluteness, and this would be enough to shatter the pretense. (RD 35)

The notion of 'ascent' here to a 'beyond' may suggest a shift of our focus from the beings [*Seiende*] that are 'nearby,' to others that are 'far' away, a kind of esotericism wholly in the realm of beings, and a forgetting of *Being* (which is not *a being*). But with respect to the question of Being [*die Seinsfrage*] itself, the question still seems to arise: how can a thinker whose thinking transcends a 'metaphysically'-determined view of the truth,

affirm his thinking to a realm of thinking where this very 'metaphysical' essence of truth "is present as the all-dominating fundamental reality" (PDT 181)? This assertion of *another* ostensibly foreign standpoint need not simply shatter the philosopher's claim of 'absoluteness' (or transcendence), provided he can show that this standpoint is in fact comprehended by his own. But as Plato notes, a sudden transition from one locus of *unhiddenness* to another – as when moving from a dim cave to bright sunlight or from bright sunlight into a dim cave – causes, temporarily, blindness, not illumination. Certainly before a prisoner undertakes the journey out of the cave, or vice versa, he must be sufficiently oriented *where he is*, in order to be in a position to make his way to somewhere else.

Therefore, philosophic understanding, insofar as it can claim to express the 'enlightened' truth that is found 'outside the cave,' must *contain* the contingent historical understanding found 'inside the cave' – *philosophical understanding* must be connected to and integrated with the totality of *contingent historical understandings* if the former is to be seen as comprehending the latter. If the prisoner/Dasein is to take control of the destiny of his understanding and transcend his merely finite historical understanding, he must first be sufficiently familiar with his own faculties to understand the way in which they are, or are not, a suitable *means* of taking control (which is not to imply that they *must* be made the object of a thematic investigation, an *existenzial* analysis). Merely *supposing* that the realm of the 'most true' existed would not guarantee that he was able to set out to get there. Nor would it determine the sense in which doing so should be regarded as a universal avocation, nor the sense in which he should understand this avocation to apply to him. Should he not call into question beforehand whether the kind

of Being that is most his own should indeed realize its ownmost destiny in striving for eternity, finality, or whether the most true is to be found through dwelling in 'flux'? Unless the prisoner is to be miraculously enlightened (by a gift of grace, perhaps) and shown the way out of the alleged 'cave,' he must make do first of all with whatever resources are at hand that he can already count his *own*, and the very nature of the 'cave' in question dictates that the understanding available there, based on the *Vorhabe*, *Vorsicht*, and *Vorgriff* of the prisoners, is partial, shadowy, and passing (i.e., inconstant, changeable opinions), *not* directed to eternal objects of contemplation (although, if the 'allegory' is to be trusted, not entirely foreign to these either).

It is necessary, then, if we are to proceed with any confidence towards a transcendent philosophic grasp of truth, that we already be in the truth, in a region of unhiddenness, and this possibility, of being in the truth, must be intrinsic to our very way of Being, even in the cave. Such truth, to have any claim on those in the cave, must have a *Sitz im Leben*, a 'footing' in the life of the cave. But this requirement brings us to Fackenheim's *sole concern* in "The Historicity and Transcendence of Philosophic Truth": "*How can philosophic thought be rooted in history, and emerge from history, and yet reach a truth which is transcendent?*" (82). How can any *Vorgriff*, which, so far as we are determined to have it transcend the status of a 'mere historical opinion,' which we at first hold only tentatively [*vorbehaltlich*], become finally valid [*endgültig*]? How is the philosophical leap into the circular being of Dasein possible, while retaining its philosophical character of transcendence?

Heidegger's answer, as Fackenheim puts it, is that "the *existenzial* philosophic analysis can refute historicism only because *Dasein's existenziell* understanding also and

already refutes it" (HTPT 86). According to Heidegger, "Without an *existenziell* understanding all analysis of *Existenzialität* will remain groundless [*bodenlos*]" (SZ 312). And of course Dasein cannot *be* without *some* kind of *existenziell* (historically situated) understanding, no matter how 'primitive' or naïve; but if we recognize this, the pressing question remains: "where are ontological projections [*existenzial* analyses] to get the evidence that their 'findings' are phenomenally appropriate?" (ibid.) Surely it cannot be the case that any opinion whatsoever about Being, or about the kind of Being of Dasein [*der Seinsart des Daseins*], is transcendently true.

> Whence is one to derive what makes up the 'authentic' *Existenz* of *Dasein*? ... Is the provided interpretation of the authenticity and wholeness of *Dasein* based on an ontic grasp of *Existenz* which, while possible, need not be binding for everyone? The *existenzial* interpretation will never wish to make its own merely arbitrary decisions concerning *existenziell* possibilities and obligations. And yet, must it not justify itself concerning those *existenziell* possibilities with which it gives the ontological interpretation its ontic ground?[14]

Since all philosophizing must start from an everyday understanding (all transcendent *existenzial* analysis must start with an historical *existenziell* interpretation) is it not the case, as Fackenheim asks, "that *any* historical claim to *existenziell* authenticity may have

[14] "Aber gleichwohl, woran ist abzunehmen, was die »eigentliche« Existenz des Daseins ausmacht? ... Liegt der durchgeführten Interpretation der Eigentlichkeit und Ganzheit des Daseins nicht eine ontische Auffassung von Existenz zugrunde, die möglich sein mag, aber doch nicht für jeden verbindlich zu sein braucht? Die existenziale Interpretation wird nie einen Machtspruch über existenzielle Möglichkeiten und Verbindlichkeiten übernehmen wollen. Aber muß sie sich nicht selbst rechtfertigen hinsichtlich der existenziellen Möglichkeiten, mit denen sie *der* ontologischen Interpretation den ontischen Boden gibt?" (SZ 312)

its own *existenzial* interpretation?" And wouldn't this imply "that, after all, historicism has won out" (HTPT 87)?

At least part of Heidegger's query (above) is echoed by Guignon:

> Is there any guarantee that the essential structures to be discovered in the existential analytic are not simply products of the linguistic organization of the world of a specific culture, even assuming this linguistic understanding has been interpreted to uncover its deep meaning? (Guignon 212)

Guignon answers this question in the negative: clearly the *existenzial* analytic *is* a "product of the linguistic organization of the world of a specific culture" and (not so clearly) does not, as such, possess the kind of standpoint from which it could make anything *but* 'arbitrary decisions' concerning *existenziell* possibilities and obligations. Guignon notes:

> it seems that [Heidegger] later came to realize that the two tasks [transcendental and historical] in fact tend to undermine each other: the findings of the transcendental stage shatter the prospects of finding the underlying meaning of history, and the historicity of the question of Being defeats the project of finding a transcendental horizon or essential structures to ground a fundamental ontology. (Guignon 232)

Thus it appears to Guignon that Heidegger fails in his attempt to make "transience itself" into a transcendent ("atemporal") principle (Guignon 247). "When the foundationalist aims of [*Being and Time*] are abandoned, however, historicity comes to refer not to some sort of timeless temporalization structure of temporality, but rather to the transience and contextualization of all human activities" (ibid). And perhaps the conclusion of Fackenheim's more restricted analysis (of *Sein und Zeit*), although significantly different in detail from Guignon's analysis, really amounts to very much the same. By Fackenheim's account, historicism, when taken as a transcendent principle, empties the transcendent of all content: "the empty truth which remains – a 'pure that' without what, a 'decisiveness' without decision – retains its transcendence, and does so precisely at the price of emptiness." (HTPT 88)

But can this kind of blanket characterization – one of "transience and contextualization" – really be applied in such an apparently undifferentiated manner to *all* human activities? To use Fackenheim's examples, can it be applied to "the moral language of a Himmler as well as a Schweitzer, or the religious language of *Mein Kampf* as well as the Bible?" (HTPT 82-3). If the supposedly stable, normative terms that are privileged in rational discourse are interpreted as being grounded solely in the *history* of Being, the result, for a philosopher like Karl Löwith (one of Heidegger's own students), seems to be a radical destabilization of reason and what counts as 'reasonable.' Löwith points out an "unavoidable thought" in this vein: "in der Geschichte alles auch hätte anders kommen können" (Löwith 20) – in history everything could have turned out quite differently. So it seems that if reason and truth are *essentially* historical, then this

realization should infect our current thinking such that we need no longer feel ourselves *bound*, at least not by any kind of transcendent reason, or to any particular set of beliefs. If the lone remainder of that-which-remains (*das Bleibende*) is a transcending belief in the historicity of all beliefs, from such a philosophical foundation, it might be feared, anything might be permissible. We are deprived of any principled way to prevent or condemn the rise of what clearly appear to be thoroughly disastrous beliefs (perhaps Heidegger's seeing fit to join the Nazi party in 1933 might be taken as evidence of this danger). At the same time any number of good and noble beliefs might be abandoned. History as such cannot tell us what is right or wrong, true or false: "on the basis of [mere] history, the one lets itself be derived just as well – or as badly – as the other."[15] The meandering course of history, at least history considered as a mere series of events, cannot provide a secure frame of reference for thinking, even if such is what thinking seems to demand and require (especially since thinking is inevitably, it seems, forced to confront the theme of *obligation* [*Verbindlichkeiten*]). Perhaps, in accordance with a vulgar reading of Sartre's "first principle of existentialism" ("man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" [Sartre 79]), the good is determined, *ipso facto*, by whatever man chooses.[16] In this case we may appear to be out of the frying pan and into the fire; freed from the totalitarian rule of unshakeable truth, only to be subjugated to totalitarian individuals, whose 'right to choose' is limited only by external constraints.[17] Heidegger's words may appear to confirm this radical transience and contextualization of human activities: since meaning [*Sinn*] is a formal element belonging to *Dasein's* projection

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[15] "...sich aus der Geschichte das eine so gut und so schlecht wie das andere ableiten läßt" (Krüger 21).
[16] Determined firstly for himself as an individual, but in this, also for everyone – "We *always* choose the good [emphasis added], and nothing can be good for us without being good for all" (Sartre 79).
[17] Cf. Sartre 85: "Tomorrow, after my death, some men may decide to set up Fascism… Fascism will then be the human reality… Things will be as man will have decided they are to be."

[*Entwurf*], not a characteristic that attaches to *entities* (SZ 151), my predilection for *my* projection of meaning over against that of another can only be arbitrary. This kind of emphasis in interpreting Heidegger's analysis of our existential situation seems to bring with it nihilistic dangers – whereby life is seen as meaningless, or, equivalently, having any meaning whatsoever, abandoned as it is to the 'positing' of 'values' – that we might think are best avoided, if that is possible.[18] And indeed we might wonder whether part of the task of philosophy is precisely to avoid nihilism, to insist *a priori* that the purpose of the kind of critical questioning that constitutes philosophy is to bring us to a fruitful encounter precisely with whatever can be found to be most deeply meaningful.

But as Langan points out, whereas we can (like Foucault) stress

> the discontinuity in history, the plurality of autonomous traditions such as medicine, economics or grammar, and the abruptness of epochal changes, …from this pluralistic assertion it does not follow that there is no dominant essence giving its basic character to each historical epoch, nor that there is no fundamental tradition reaching back through a long suite of epochs and giving them a sense in relation to one another, nor, finally, that there is no overarching sense to human existence as such (Langan 11).

Although *Being and Time* sets out the task of de-structing the history of Western philosophy (viewed as a search for absolute truth, objectivity, certainty), some kind of

[18] Especially when we are faced with the specific danger, as Leo Strauss puts it, of a "nihilism that … is not more than an alibi for thoughtlessness and vulgarity … conformism and philistinism" (WPP 20).

flaccid relativism, will-to-meaning, or merely pragmatic cultural politics, is certainly not the *intended* result of this de-struction. On the contrary, as Langan sees it:

> Our very metaphysics is itself traditional. It is a way of thinking and interpreting the world which has been influenced by events and handed down to us as both a need to search in a certain way and as a set of possibilities for analyzing and synthesizing. The philosopher's first task, therefore, as the man of critical reflective thought, the one committed to acting responsibly, is somehow to come to terms with his own tradition. (Langan, 3)

Heidegger's conclusions regarding the finite existential horizon for asking the question of Being could not claim to be *the* final word on the question of Being (which is not to deny that his conclusion does make a claim to transcendence) – instead his discussion is preliminary, oriented to preparing an adequate horizon for asking questions that are alive to true thinking. The phenomenological investigation into the most primordial horizon of our understanding is oriented precisely to openness and insofar as there is any finality in the 'findings' of this investigation, these must be characterized precisely by openness – although defending Heidegger will require an explanation of how this 'openness' isn't just a euphemistic substitution for 'emptiness.'

In accordance with this 'openness' of Heidegger's preliminary findings on the question of being, it is possible for the kind of 'fundamental ontology' he proposes in *Being and Time* to be opposed by some other account that offers its own terms as an alternative. But this cannot be achieved by the naked form of a 'refutation,'[19] a refutation, that is, that is willfully blind with respect to the domain of questioning it seeks to refute,

[19] As Heidegger states in his "Humanismusbrief": "*Alles Widerlegen im Felde des wesentlichen Denkens ist töricht*" (W 167) – all refutation in the field of essential thinking is foolish.

which refuses to 'step back' and acquiesce in what appears, that fails to be fitting [*schicklich*]. But a mere gesture towards 'the fitting' [*das Schickliche*], leaves us with the problem of determining what *is* fitting, how we *could* compare the "essential thinking" of rival ontologies, when apparently we lack (or have been denied) any rational basis for such comparison, a situation which can leave philosophers, as Fackenheim puts it, "to wallow without purpose and direction in one of the fragments of the disrupted modern world" (RD 13). Heidegger's analysis of everydayness – idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity (*Gerede*, *Neugier*, and *Zweideutigkeit*), leading to Dasein's alienation from the authentic grounds of its understanding projection of the world – can warn us not only of the danger of adopting a stance of all-knowingness in terms of our absorbed engagement with the most current concerns of *das Man*; such 'falling' everydayness can also be implicated in a hasty conclusion to the historical relativity of all truth and the impossibility of discovering anything that is of *essential* importance in human concerns.

At this point in our discussion, it is not at all clear what is really at stake in Heidegger's emptying the transcendent of content (Fackenheim), or, alternately, in his relinquishing the transcendent altogether (Guignon). Some such position appears to be the necessary corollary of historicity. What does this mean with respect to issues of real concern to us?[20] Heidegger's analysis of essential existential interpretative structures cannot straightforwardly lead to positive *ontic doctrines* – doctrines concerning what things exist, how we should act, what we can hope for – doctrines that pertain, not just to the hermeneutic framework that lends intelligibility to beings in general, but to our

[20] And it seems here we need the supposition that our thinking is far enough 'on the way' to be reflective about such a question, that we have an adequate grasp of what issues *are* of 'real concern' to us, a supposition which one should not grant to oneself carelessly, even (or rather, especially) if one counts oneself a 'philosopher.'

positive understanding of specific beings (*Seiende*) which appear within that framework.[21] Perhaps we are called, as Langan says, to a deep appropriation of our tradition (or our 'heritage' [*Erbe*], as Heidegger puts it). But, at the same time, it remains for us to ask whether what issues from an issue with the past, when carried out on Heideggerian terms, in the context of a transcending historicity, can ever be satisfying.

[21] This is not to suggest that such doctrines are irrelevant to our ongoing ontic-ontological analysis.

§5. The necessity of ontological truth (unhiddenness) for ontic truth (correctness)

Although it is possible to be unhappy with an approach to philosophic truth that must remain rooted in history, such unhappiness can hardly gainsay the authenticity of the phenomena which appear in Heidegger's analysis. Indeed, even in Plato's 'allegory' of the cave, where we first hear the call to seek the 'most true' by means of παιδεια, Heidegger's *existenzial* analysis appears to be quite at home, at least as a necessary *pro*-paedeutic. In Plato's 'allegory' we are always in *un*truth; truth, *unhiddenness*, is always in play with untruth, *hiddenness*. Truth and untruth are equiprimordial [*gleichürsprungliche*] moments/springs of our Being. It is in the nature of things that are *un*hidden, that they were once *hidden*, and to say that something is hidden implies that it is not *entirely un*known (it can at least be gestured towards in its hiddenness), and so there is the possibility that it may yet become *un*hidden. It is in this context that we must understand Heidegger's rejection of 'eternal truths.' His rejection does not amount to rejecting the *correctness* of propositions that we count as *true*. That "*Wahrheit »gibt es« nur, sofern und solange Dasein ist*" (SZ 226), that there is (that "it gives") truth only so far and so long as Dasein is, seems only obvious when the truth in question has been explicated as the *unhiddenness for Dasein* of that which is unhidden, or the *disclosedness to Dasein* of that which is disclosed. Further, what the disclosure of beings reveals is "*das Seiende, das vordem schon war*" (*ibid.*), a being that before being uncovered, before becoming *true* (*α-ληθές*) in the *ontological* sense, before being disclosed to understanding, already *was* (in the *ontic* sense). When the truth about some being [*Seiende*] is disclosed to Dasein, it is disclosed precisely *as* that which *was* true, *was* the

case, even before being disclosed. "*Ebensowenig liegt in dieser »Beschränkung«* [of 'truth' to 'unhiddenness'] *eine Herabminderung des Wahrseins der »Wahrheiten«*" (SZ 227), in this 'restriction' of the meaning of truth, there is no question of a lessening of the being-true of 'truths.' The *being* of beings precedes the *knowing* of beings. In this context, then, inasmuch as the essence of truth lies in disclosedness to Dasein, it follows quite trivially that nothing can be eternally true unless Dasein is eternal, and the proof for Dasein's eternity has yet to be given. On the contrary, Da-sein is *not* always *there* (*Da*), in some settled, determinate sense, but *is* constantly in passing (the extreme and quite universal case of this being death).

On the one hand, then, for it to be possible to compare competing conceptions of some matter so as to determine which is more true in the sense of more *correct*, this can clearly only be possible on the basis of the prior unhiddenness, within a common horizon, of each of the competing conceptions. On the other hand, the possibility of one conception becoming "more true," in the sense of its coming to predominate in the realm of what is *unhidden/unconcealed*, is a quite different concrete possibility of the way of being [*Seinsart*] of Dasein; and as the passages in and out of the cave show, the *truth qua correctness* – the *ontic truth* – of a particular understanding of beings is a different matter from the degree of currency that its mode of unconcealing – its *ontological truth* – happens to enjoy. While Plato's cave 'allegory' bears witness to a change in the dominant meaning of truth, from unhiddenness to correctness, it just as clearly provides evidence for the need to examine the conditions for the possibility of recognizing what counts as correct, how it could be that one truth is *more true* than another, since this is clearly no simple matter of what determination of truth is currently most evident 'to us.'

The possibility of our determining what is αληθέστατον cannot be established by proposing a merely abstract ideal of eternal truth that has not been grounded in relation to Dasein's actual (factical) comportment, or that may not in fact be suited to the concrete possibilities of disclosure of his actual horizon of understanding. Indeed, the prisoner in the 'allegory' must completely *turn around* (περιαγωγή όλης τής ψυχής [cf. PDT 166] – the being-led in a new direction of the whole soul) and *leave* the cave to attain a vision of the eternal truths; he cannot just posit their existence *in mente* and thus be well satisfied (although this may in some sense be his starting point).

Thus, in asking the question whether or not Dasein's horizon of understanding *makes possible* the apprehension of eternal truths, we must also ask how it is that Dasein comes to *recognize* this possibility. If covering-up (*Verdecken*) is a basic characteristic of Dasein's Being-in-the-world (as it is also in all stages of the cave 'allegory'), this covering-up is possible with respect to the *Sache* inquired about in either question – the *possibility* of apprehending eternal truths and the conditions for *recognizing* this possibility (or its essential meaning). An analysis that uncovered Dasein's *essential* constitution should help to lay bare the basic structures of Dasein's understanding: whether or not Dasein has the resources to find its way out of the cave; or how it is that such an 'allegory' does or does not make sense in light of this essential constitution.

Heidegger takes the analysis of this essential constitution of Dasein as the necessary starting point of the inquiry into the disclosedness of Being. For ontic truth to be, Dasein must discover (*entdecken*) beings. But when Dasein discovers beings, this is accomplished only on the basis of an at least vague, average understanding of being. On this basis, beings are discovered *as* beings, *das vordem schon war*, that before they were

uncovered, already were. Should their uncoveredness (*Entdecktheit*) be lost, there is no sense in which the ontic truth about these beings will become *false*. In its most basic sense, however, truth *is Entdecktheit*; *Entdecktheit* first *makes possible* the truth or falsity of propositions like Newton's laws. While Plato's 'allegory' is oriented towards the goal of coming to see that which is *most true*, the analysis of Dasein's essential constitution seeks to answer the prior question: how does *anything* come to be true (i.e., *unhidden/ disclosed to our understanding*) in the first place? Or, otherwise put: what is the structure of Being, what is the *Seinsart der Wahrheit* (truth's way-of-being) and, necessarily, the *Seinsart* of the *Seiende*, Dasein, *for which* the truth in question *is true* (*unhidden*). There is a sense, then, in which Heidegger's emphasis on truth's constant play with untruth seems to reduce to a triviality familiar to anyone with common sense, and if Heidegger's can be counted a *prior* question, a subsequent question as to what is *eternally* true, or αληθέστατον, cannot on this count be considered otiose; instead the context is established from which the grounds of intelligibility for such an inquiry must first appear.

The possibility of discerning the true and the false, of non-arbitrarily choosing from history "*das eine*" rather than "*das andere*," is contingent upon *Entdecktheit*. *Entdecktheit*, in turn, is realized on the basis of *assertions* (*Aussagen*), which *point out* (*aufzeigen*) beings that are uncovered (or, *uncover* beings *by* pointing them out), allowing their truth to be *articulated* and spoken out (*ausgesprochen*). The *Aussage*, then, is originally used in direct connection with the being, to point it out, and insofar as it serves this purpose it comes to function as a tool that is always available, ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*), for pointing out this kind of being in some particular way. But this constant availability of an *Aussage* means that its original connection to the thing it points out, and

to the original *purpose* for pointing it out, need not be maintained. Instead, in its everyday understanding, Dasein naturally assumes a theoretical stance, where beings are regarded as things simply *present* (*vorhanden*) in themselves, independent of the meaningfulness of the original experience where they were concretely pointed-out. Thus truth becomes *attached* to the conceptual articulation of the *Aussage*, as if truth were an intrinsic property of a particular form of words, and *detached* from the original pointing-out experience in which it was produced. In this way the *Aussage* is cut loose from its concrete origins and becomes a matter of common knowledge, something that anybody is capable of 'saying out,' and its sole meaning thus becomes its role in everyday discourse. This everyday role, then, rather than being determined by the appearing of the *thing itself*, is determined by common consent, what 'they' say (*das Man*). It is determined, then, by the shifting sands of hearsay, idle chatter (*Gerede*), for which no one (except '*das Man*') is responsible.

Everyday (*alltägliche*) *Entdecktheit* (or *Erschlossenheit* – disclosedness), then, is in its essential constitution enmeshed in the idle chatter of *das Man*, and the result is the covering-up (*Verdeckung*) of the experience of the thing itself (this being the case, too, when the thing is a 'shadow on the wall'). Further, the everyday *self* of Dasein *is das Man*; what *I* know is determined by what '*they*' say; to say that *I* know is no different from saying 'it is known.' The assertions of this kind of idle chatter (*Gerede*), then, do have the appearance of eternal truths with quasi-eternal objects. These truths are constantly and 'always' available, regardless of whether the *Seiende* that an *Aussage* originally pointed out 'always' continues to be, because idle chatter, hearsay, *about* a *Seiende* goes on independently *of* the *Seiende*. And a being that *has been* uncovered in

itself, and articulated and spoken-out in an *Aussage*, *has been* uncovered, *has been* true; and it will *always* (*eternally*) be true of the *Aussage*, that it *was* true (*entdeckend*). In Husserl's terms, to produce an *entdeckende Aussage* is a creative activity that yields, as its spiritual achievement, truth. Morrison writes of Husserl's conception of truth that a body of truths (like geometry)

> is "a total acquisition of spiritual achievements" (*Leistungen*) which ultimately go back to a series of "creative activities." These activities were themselves subjective *acts* in the minds of the first geometers [or in general, those who first uncover truths]. The question of the origin of geometry [or other domains of truth] is an historical investigation because the original evidence of geometry [etc.] was itself historical, i.e., came into being in the minds of historical persons. (Morrison 327)

The essential content of an *Aussage*, what it points out, its truth, can thus be viewed as what is achieved in a *spiritual act* that simply *is what it is*, an act the essence of which lies in its disclosure of a particular truth; this spiritual act of pointing-out is, as such, transcendently valid beyond any particular instance and is repeatable in principle by other subjects, whether or not it actually is repeated, and whether or not the idle chatter of *das Man* tends to obscure the beings originally pointed out by its familiar stock of assertions.

The possibility of recreating a spiritual achievement of this kind, then, seems to guarantee the eternity of the truth it *uncovers*, even if there is no reason to assume that it will *be* eternally *uncovered*. But this kind of truth appears to be eternal only by virtue of an abstract ossification of an historical occurrence, the original spiritual act, and while it may satisfy the meaning that is usually implied when we say that an assertion is true, it

leaves out a vital part of the context of the act of pointing-out the truth: Pointing-out the truth does not count as a spiritual *achievement* solely in virtue of the truth it points out – that is, apart from some context (*Zusammenhang*), both with regard to its content and that of the situation in which it is pointed-out. In some sense the grasping of truth by a finite subject (spirit) in an infinite universe (non-spirit) *is* an achievement (*Leistung*) which affirms the superiority of finite subject over infinite universe: even if spirit faces death and knows not what lies beyond, nonetheless, as long as it lives, it *knows*, both itself and the universe. The universe always just *is* (*als Vorhandene* – as present-at-hand), knowing nothing. But if a finite knowing subject, conscious of being at the point of death, continues to recreate in its intellect pure spiritual acts of knowing, those that constitute, for example, the eternal truths of geometry, it is far from clear that this should be accounted a spiritual *achievement*, any more than it should be considered a great spiritual achievement for a monkey to learn the alphabet. It is not as if the point of pointing things out could be found simply in demonstrating one's superiority to the universe or one's own cleverness. Certainly there may *be* a point in trying to point something like this out, but that point is found in the role played by this kind of truth in our coming to reflect upon what we are and upon our essential relation to the mystery of being. Truth for the *philosophia perennis*, as for Heidegger, must form part of a totality and grasping what is most true requires that our understanding of individual truths, our individual spiritual acts, be incorporated into the whole of truth, the totality of our spiritual acts, in the proper manner.

For Heidegger, there is a unity to what we uncover because all of our uncovering is a function of what we care about (of *Sorge*). But for the most part what we are

concerned about, what constitutes the focus of our care, and gets uncovered, is not determined by Dasein's direct relatedness to the things themselves, but is mediated by the concerns of *das Man* (which *is* our *everyday self*). For a truth to matter (for it to be worth asserting) depends on an understanding of its involvement in a whole, but the everyday concerns of *das Man* press themselves upon us, pushing us to get on with a multitude of urgent, immediate items of business, and discouraging any thought of the whole. The obviousness (*Selbstverständlichkeit*) of what is to be done, obvious precisely *because it is* what "*is done*," tends to hide its significance (why do I go to work, why do I read the newspaper, why would I get married, etc.), which is only determinable insofar as it functions as part of a whole. Thus the original *truth* about what is done is hidden, since *das Man*'s proximal "everyday" reason for doing what we do, that it *is done*, in general appears to be a rather poor last resort as an explanation for *why* it is done.

Without passing judgment on any particular truth, or any particular understanding of the what and how of truth in its possible *eternal* constitution (as understood by a '*philosophia perennis*'), we can see that the *proximal* constitution of the truth, in reliance on what 'everyone' says and what passes in this way for obvious, can in fact leave us alienated from the original meaning and horizon of intelligibility of that which currently circulates as true. To be sure, it is no part of *philosophia perennis* that what is most true is easily knowable or that what is obvious to 'common sense' can act as a guide to the 'most true.' However, given that the primary way in which truth comes to be uncovered is in reliance on what 'they' say, we certainly face a significant barrier to the possibility our grasping transcendent truth. It is natural to ask if it is possible to transcend this realm of the unowned self and if so, how, in what manner? Will something be achieved by

'authenticating' our knowledge (grasping it in the mode of authenticity [*Eigentlichkeit*]), or will we be faced in the end, as Rosen says, merely with "the ungrounded pointlessness of the gift of disclosure" (QoB xx)?

As noted by the Pyrrhonist skeptics, if we are in the preliminary stages of our inquiry and cannot presume ourselves already to have achieved a grasp of eternal or transcendent truth, including the truth about our own essential constitution, and are unsure of the marks by which we could recognize it, we cannot appeal to this realm of truth as a standard by which to measure our progress towards such truth. Our conception of truth requires historical roots, a '*Sitz im Leben*,' that is already accessible to us so that we can "discriminat[e] between claims to truth which occur in the *Lebenswelt*" (HTPT 82) (since the *Lebenswelt* is where we are doing our discriminating). We must have a clear idea then of the *meaning* of the eternal, or universal, or transcendent in our *Lebenswelt*. With Heidegger's emphasis on the originary notion of truth as unconcealedness, Newton's laws wouldn't become *false*, should they cease to be '*true*,' should they cease to inhere in the openness that occurs through the Being of Dasein – they would just no longer be present-at-hand to the consciousness of a human being or available for her use – and meaning, of course, is only manifested in use, in an actual projection of meaning by Dasein. But certainly insofar as we might think Newton's laws are 'eternally' correct[22] (at least in standard applications, i.e., to medium-sized objects at low speeds), we certainly don't think this has anything to do with their being eternally 'true' in the sense of being eternally uncovered. We can likewise think of Wittgenstein's meaning-is-use dictum as obvious common sense: it is obvious that if we don't know the

[22] 'Eternal' is taken here in a somewhat loose sense to express the permanence of the structure of the world (of 'creation'), independent of human beings.

meaning of a word it is necessary to examine how it is used, since only the way it is being used as a tool in some language game, some clearing of Being, reveals its meaning. Beyond the way in which they point out the obvious, however, it is unclear what the implications should be of these observations about our understanding Being-in-the-world for the subsequent development of metaphysical thinking. Truth as *uncoveredness* is obviously only possible when beings are uncovered by Dasein, that is, relative to Dasein's understanding. But it also appears to follow naturally that what we hold to be 'true' can no longer be *correct* except relative to a particular clearing of Being, or linguistic community, and the situation by which this correctness is measured is perhaps necessarily confined to a finite historical manifestation that is essentially in flux and always, in fact, passing away. As Guignon puts it:

> The ultimate ground for our understanding of the world does not lie in access to theory-neutral facts or context-independent objects that can be used to reconstruct our experience of the world. Instead, the ground for our beliefs and practices lies in nothing other than the shared agreement in judgments which we attain in being acculturated into the publicly intelligible world. (Guignon 176)

This 'nothing other than' that grounds our beliefs and practices bears closer examination: In what does this 'acculturation,' or 'public intelligibility,' consist? On the *basis* of such a ground of belief, how could *knowledge* that such is the ground for our belief be *possible*? Is it that we have been acculturated to accept such a ground of belief, or that such a belief is in general circulation and 'is thought to be' publicly intelligible? If

we are able to accept the obvious circularity of such grounding, we must still ask: 'thought to be so' *by whom*? By everyone? By those who are 'enlightened'? By those in power, regardless of how 'power' happens to be wielded in my culture? Who should decide this? (Or has it already been decided??) Was there any attempt made, in coming to this conclusion about the grounds of our beliefs and practices, to rigorously ground what counts as 'publicly intelligible'? What if what we are lacking is precisely 'shared agreement in judgments'? If this ground for our beliefs is missing and we have no *other* grounds by which to establish 'shared agreement in judgments,' is our situation not hopeless, consigned irretrievably to follow a multifarious succession of beliefs and practices with no transcending meaning, mere products of the blind machinations of fate? Krüger asks:

> Is it really true, what people today – according to both philosophical and popular opinion – are finding to be ever more obvious: that man's way of living, from its very foundations, is historical? That he has no persisting essence, no defining characterization that holds firm, but rather is always changing, creatively prescribing for himself the meaning of his existence? Does not the present situation – the hopelessness of politics, the inescapable individualism and despair of isolation, the burden of existing, the anxiety –show that something is awry here?[23]

[23] "Ist es wirklich wahr, was man heute – philosophisch oder populär – immer selbstverständlicher findet: daß der Mensch von Grund auf geschichtlich lebt? daß er kein bleibendes Wesen und keine feststehende Bestimmung hat sondern sich immer wandelt und sich selbst den Sinn seines Daseins schöpferisch vorzeichnet? Zeigt uns nicht die politische Ausweglosigkeit der Gegenwart, die hoffnungslose Vereinzelung, die Last des Existierens und die Angst, daß hier etwas nicht stimmt?" (Krüger 9)

Nonetheless, though we might sympathize with Krüger's lament, it has apparently always been so, at least more or less. But if this is the case, is it not a "dogmatic construction" (BT 37) that is being foisted on reality to assume that *etwas nicht stimmt*? *Stimmen* means to *be right*, to *go* or *fit* (*together*) (*zusammenpassen*) – in what sense can a constant and unavoidable way-in-which-things-have-turned-out [*Befindlichkeit*] be called not 'right'? Why not think rather that a fixation upon utopian constructions of a future state of mankind where such elements are overcome is *was nicht stimmt* – insofar at least as we are committed to a sober mature view of what is possible for human society? To say that something about the situation we currently face *stimmt nicht* suggests that we hold out some hope for an improved future; but "unless there are present origins of this future this projection reduces itself to a groundless hope and an empty conceit" (ARRA 698). But in this case there remains a sense in which *was stimmt* – what is contained in a *correct* view of what exists – *stimmt nicht*; there is a gap between where we are and where we would like to be, and to without further ado insist that we close this gap by reforming where we would like to be, so that it conforms to where we are, is in some sense equally free-floating. Certainly we cannot wish to propose to ourselves, on the basis of what we would like the world to be like, projects that can with good reason, in the world as we know it, be thought to conflict with what is possible; but to avoid doing so requires that we first *know* where we are, that we have in the first place appropriated the world and its possibilities; and indeed, that we understand that it is in the very nature of what may be called our essential activity, our projecting of possibilities, that what we inevitably grasp *zunächst und zumeist* (firstly and for the most part) in terms of some positive projection, also entails, most often without our noticing it, turning away

from and closing off other possibilities. "But in that case the problem of obtaining and securing the kind of access which will lead to" an understanding of this constantly forgotten negative content "becomes even more a burning one."[24] For inasmuch as we take up the project of attuning ourselves in all soberness to the genuine possibilities of our existence which come to presence within the historical situation of our Being-in-the-world – and do so *as the result of our projecting, our mood of soberness, our dedication to developing an understanding of existence in a certain way*; to this extent we must walk a fine line in balancing the conceptual play between what is and what ought to be, in fruitfully developing a projection of the essences of things.

In identifying the need for such delicacy, we must presuppose the truth of Hegel's claim that we must know "not only that God [or "*was vernünftig ist*" – "what is rational"] is actual, the most actual, indeed, alone truly actual, but also ... that existence in general is partly appearance and only partly actual" (quoted in ARRA 697). The distinguishing of 'appearance' from 'actuality' is no easy task and is fraught with danger. It is possible to say many things that are true about what merely *exists*, while covering over what is *actual* [*wirklich*], active for the good, i.e., in accordance with reason.[25]

In one way or another, *what is* grounds *what ought to be*; only an acknowledgment of *what is*, of what is fundamentally *given* and irreformable, can form the basis of what ought to be, what is to be cultivated and what to be reformed. In other

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[24] Cp. BT 37: "But in that case the problem of obtaining and securing the kind of access which will lead to Dasein becomes even more a burning one."

[25] An example of this kind of difficulty and danger, even for 'great thinkers,' is given in what Fackenheim says of Marx: "Marx has a sharp eye for religion insofar as it diminishes man – servile fears, escapist otherworldly hopes, the uses made of such "opiate" by oppressors. To religion insofar as it enhances man, he is wholly obtuse. Indeed, one may doubt whether any thinker of stature has ever given so sorry an account of himself in this particular sphere.... Marx asserts that the more a person gives to god the less he has left for himself. Even a thoroughgoing skeptic may recognize in *homo religiosus* one who, the more he gives, the more he has to give" (TMW 126).

words, only when something is *given*, as having some content, as being ordained to some end, is it possible to differentiate what can only be accepted as brute *fact*, what is contingently *possible*, and what *should* be done or undone in view of the essence of whatever is in question.[26] Here we might think of Heidegger's resoluteness, or resolute openness [*Entschlossenheit*], as a possible way of conceptualizing the grounds of *givenness*, inasmuch as given*ness* is inevitably implied by what is more proper to *Entschlossenheit*, giv*ing*. But can such a position [*Setzung*] satisfy our need for *givenness*? Can a resolute *giving to oneself* of the '*given*' possibly be an adequate response to such a demand?

[26] Cf. Fackenheim's "On the actuality of the rational and the rationality of the actual" (quoting Hegel): "*Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich...*": we are essentially called, *in* what exists, to discover, *out of* what exists, that the rational *is actual*; "*...und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig*": and that by which we make distinctions that allow us to orient ourselves in the world, and to orient the world to ourselves, must be the actual which *is rational*. Cp. also Lauer: "For Husserl ... absolute being can only be essential being, and the whole orientation of his phenomenology will be to a knowledge of the essential [*ti estin*]. He will not deny the existence ['*oti estin*] of a world, not even an extramental existence; he will simply deny that such an existence can have any significance for philosophy, since existence can only be contingent" (Husserl [Intro.] 5).

§6. The ontological difference and the search for authenticity

Traditionally the adequacy of our grasp of Being [*Sein*] has been (more or less) taken for granted and our analyses, investigations, our search for understanding, has focused on beings [*Seiendes*]. Here *Being* is a *giving*, through which *beings* are *given*. But an exclusive focus on the latter is inadequate, since the former is never merely an instance of the latter, Being (or giving) never merely refers to a particular being that is given; Being is always a particular *way*, with a more or less richly articulated structure and *Begrifflichkeit* ('conceptuality') that is itself more or less disclosed [*erschlossen*] (and/or more or less *explicitly/thematically* disclosed). Some *way of Being* is always the condition of the possibility of *beings* coming to light, being uncovered [*entdeckt*], and so Being determines beings in their actual and possible *modes* of *Entdecktheit*. According to Heidegger, the *ontological difference*, the difference between Being and beings, says that

> Beings are in every case characterized by a kind of Being that is constituted in a determinate way. ... The 'different' at which ontology aims, Being itself, more and more unveils within itself a richer structure.[27]

For us, then, for Dasein, both *that* beings are given at all, i.e., are uncovered, and *the way* in which they are given, are matters determined by Dasein's own way of Being [*Seinsverfassung*]. But if we are led to focus on the richness of Being itself, on the fact *that* there is a rich structure of giving making possible the uncoveredness of beings, does

[27] "Seiendes ist zwar je durch eine bestimmte Seinsverfassung charakterisiert. ...das Differente worauf die Ontologie zielt, das Sein selbst, mehr und mehr eine reichere Struktur in sich enthüllt" (GPP 109).

this mean that we are in danger of neglecting *what* is given? Does *das Seiende selbst* effectively become a nothing-in-itself, just a mode of *Entdecktheit-für, for* Dasein; or for a *Weltgeist*, or 'publicly intelligible slice of culture,' which is by its nature constantly, shiftingly evolving? What would justify this transfer of our attention from *Seiendes* to *Sein*?

Certainly in an age where an attitude of historicism has become pervasive, thinking cannot be excused from the task of responding to this attitude.[28] It becomes apparent that focusing solely on *what* is, the *beings* that are, is impossible, since these are precisely what has been called into question by historicism: beings are seen to be defined only in what is a merely transient way, in accordance with whatever conceptions happen to have been brought to the fore by that combination of forces which inscrutably happens to be dominant in a given historical epoch. In such an age it is understandable that reflective thinking, repelled by the shallowness of various reductive positivisms, would attempt to effect a shift in the focus of our search for what is 'transcendently true' (transcendent in at least the sense of encompassing all experience). Though this transcending truth is for the most part covered up and fails to be treated thematically or understood explicitly, in orienting ourselves resolutely towards the essence of truth, we are enabled to bring to light that which had been only implicit in our fallen-to-historicism understanding, to wit, the nature (the essential structures) of our own understanding

[28] As Heidegger says: "Am Ende ist das Aufkommen eines Problems des »Historismus« das deutlichste Anzeichen dafür, daß die Historie das Dasein seiner eigentlichen Geschichtlichkeit zu entfremden trachtet" (SZ 396) – in the end the arising of a problem of 'historicism' is the clearest sign that the academic study of history [with its great diversity of subject matters] is seeking to alienate Dasein from its authentic historicality (historicity). The vast field of genuine results produced by historical investigation easily becomes fodder for 'idle talk,' in turn leading to 'historicism,' i.e., an undifferentiating abandonment to the multiplicity of history. The development of our epoch along these lines calls forth a thoughtful counter-thrust in search of Dasein's authenticity.

comportment in the world. The analysis of our understanding Being-in-the-world evidently requires some kind of given, a stable point (context) of reference by which and in which to orient itself. It finds itself, however, in the midst of a world of radical becoming in which only a façade of givenness is constantly presented on the basis of the current determination of the 'average and everyday' of the 'they' [*das Man*]. On the basis of this analysis, what is discovered at bottom is the givenness of the giver as such, who exists in the tension between the need for givenness as the ground of its understanding and the reflective realization that such givenness cannot be established merely on the basis of the world, with its temporal-historical constitution, a constitution which is grounded precisely *in Dasein* as the founder of the world, in its 'world-ness.'[29] Dasein, therefore, has only the option to give itself its world in a finite way, whether in the mode of ownedness or unownedness.

But how can any notion of what should be, be developed on the basis of this essence? Is the development of an imperative to ownedness called for, or even possible? On the basis of an imperative to fulfill one's essence, unownedness meets the bill as well as ownedness – both are possible ways to develop my essence. What is the meaning of one's devotion to the enterprise of elucidating our pre-ontological understanding of Being when this is taken as a *manifestation* of *Dasein's own essence* – namely *finite understanding-projection, modally specifiable in terms of authenticity or lack thereof*? By its own self-understanding, what is the nature of this activity/task, what is important about it, what is its end? Can it be made intelligible as to its own importance and end (such that this is other than 'poetic self-expression')? Would it be appropriate to speak of "the ungrounded pointlessness of the gift of disclosure" here? (QoB xx)

[29] 'World' here signifies the openness ('truth') of Being (cf. LH 266).

That what is at issue in seeking to understand Being is not something pointless, a matter of indifference, is certainly suggested in what Zimmerman writes:

> In falling, Dasein tends to conceal from itself that its Being is at issue, i.e., that it *is* the power-to-be and to become. Dasein also conceals and passes over those events, truths, and mysteries which might remind it of the struggles involved in existing, and in founding and maintaining a world. Instead, Dasein allows itself to be guided in its actions and attitudes by the soothing interpretations which arise from existing as the "they" (Zimmerman 122).

In recognizing this possibility of Dasein, it might be easy to react by enthusiastically confronting 'the struggles involved in existing' and to dismiss all that is 'soothing' as nothing but an inauthentic palliative of the 'they,' which shields us from our ownmost existence. Thus the search for certainty, arrival, repose in the absolute, might be seen precisely as a manifestation of the tendency of falling in which Dasein conceals its character as possibility conceals, therefore, its ownmost essence. But are we to presuppose, then, that the possibility that characterizes the Being of Dasein is not such that it can be rendered actual, or is intrinsically ordained to actualization? But why should we not instead say that one way, at least, in which Dasein's ownmost possibilities are made actual is precisely in being taken up in the general understanding of the 'they' – so that they may exist precisely in the mode of *un*ownedness. And indeed, given Dasein's basic tendency toward falling, one *should* expect that they will inevitably be so taken up.[30] Inasmuch as the covering-over of the primordial experience grounding the

[30] Cp. Rosen: "It is more than possible to maintain that nihilism arises not from the absence of truth, but from its tedious presence. Man is a creature of change, who prefers novelty to truth, and so poetry to philosophy. The philosopher learns eventually not to be disconcerted by the fact that last year's truths are this year's platitudes" (N 198).

possibilities of our understanding does indeed constitute a danger, one must anticipate this danger. But one only sees whatever danger there may be in a given concrete projection - one that is always destined for a career as *unowned* - by anticipating beforehand the actual change that will be wrought by it in the *geistige*, spiritual-mental-cultural life of man (specifically, *das Man*), and by which Dasein is in some measure dominated in all of its modes of Being, even its most owned. The *existenzial* analytic of the constitutive structures of Dasein's existence only "gets straightened out … through existing itself. The question of existence is one of Dasein's ontical 'affairs'" (BT 33). Thus, the *existenzial* analytic always opens up from out of an *existenziell* understanding, an understanding of how it is with Dasein, i.e., for what and for whom one has a life to live. Only such understanding can ground an understanding of the danger inherent in one's way of expressing, of bringing to presence, Dasein's existentiality, which, again, must be seen as destined to have some effect, not only on one's ownmost understanding, but also on the most average everyday understanding that pervades our understanding proximally and for the most part [*zunächst und zumeist*]. Karl Löwith, for example, writes of Nietzsche: "He coined maxims with an unheard of harshness of which in his personal life he never was capable, maxims which entered into public consciousness and then were practiced for twelve years" (quoted in TMW 106). Just as Nietzsche's arguably *authentic* maxims might lead to perhaps *inauthentic* Nazi rhetoric, the question must arise for any interpretation of Being, whether, for all the soberness and rigour with which it is prosecuted, our analysis is possessed of the foresight to see the dangers towards which it tends.

But whether Dasein is evading its character as possibility on a practical or a theoretical (in this case ontological) level makes a good deal of difference – to a great degree Dasein's duty may be *to avoid* certain *possibilities* and we may anticipate that its attitude towards its possibility-character as such will not be neutral in its consequences for Dasein's ability to recognize and comply with this duty. In our understanding Being-in-the-world, both understanding and acting well are at issue for us. On the one hand, a foundation of *right understanding* can ground the possibility of our *acting* rightly or wrongly. In this case there is no question of evading our character as possibility, *at least in regard to our actions*: they are possibly vicious, possibly virtuous, and so is the person we become through choosing these actions. On the other hand, when we lack an understanding (whether or not this is *theoretically* articulated) of what makes for right or wrong action, then a fetishistic esteem for the possible as such can come to dominate the human reality. In the absence of any measure by which they can be judged, virtue and vice begin to lose their intelligibility within this horizon of understanding and at best a kind of pragmatic and necessarily hypocritical tolerance becomes the only virtue. There is nothing to prevent an indiscriminate repudiation of all commanding, constraining power, even the power of a truth and beauty which spontaneously bears witness to itself within the heart of man. We face the danger of being left with the cynical silliness of an all-encompassing, undifferentiating relativism, which insists that all opinions are equal, at least with regard to their *intrinsic* merit – however 'merit' is understood – and which is deaf to all challenges to its own legitimacy.

However, this kind of wanton embrace of our character-as-possibility may also close off many possibilities (paradoxically). We must retain some kind of anchor in

actuality in order for possibility to make sense: the notion of possibility, as such, is empty, just as that of Being,[31] and the same kind of (or perhaps just *the same*) concealment is at work here as identified by Heidegger in regard to the concept of Being: Our average everyday tendency of falling covers up the way in which possibility is at work, the ways in which Dasein has made possibilities present and the possibility (or impossibility) of other ways of doing so. The kind of anchor (or *Sitz im Leben*) that we grasp may be of great consequence to the actual (ontic) possibilities that open up to us, that become disclosed to our understanding. If we focus solely on Dasein's *owned* possibilities, might there not be a danger of coming to see Dasein's ownmost destiny, its highest achievement, in death, self-annihilation, hell; any other undertaking requiring that it call upon sources/resources that cannot properly be called its own, that necessarily pertain to what it can accomplish (in regard to the project of its own becoming) only in reliance on others? But there is no reason why Dasein's ownedness cannot exist precisely in the mode of reliance on others, no reason why such a stance cannot be authentically adopted, rather than one with a single-minded drive for independence, or an entrenched attitude of rebellion toward all authority.

But if ownedness in these terms *is possible*, the problem remains of distinguishing from the possibilities that appear *what is* most our own, most primordial, what way of thinking actually *is fitting*.

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[31] Just as Being is always the Being *of* beings, possibility is always the possibility *of* a being. Possibility must have a "*Sitz in*" actuality.

§7. The fittingness of death

It may appear to be the case that any projection of understanding whatsoever can be called authentic and that any existenziell interpretation is as legitimate as any other – the only necessity when it comes to safeguarding the essence of Dasein is openness to Being. But this would be problematic. According to Rosen:

> Very simply stated, openness to Being, or to that which regions, is compatible with doing nothing or with doing anything at all. … It therefore remains permanently unclear why Heidegger's resolution of the problem of nihilism is not itself nihilism on the grand scale. (QoB xix)

So long as I understand that Dasein is the founder, in owned and unowned modes, of the world-ness of my interpretation and of its particularities, it appears that there is no distinguishing on rational, evaluative (i.e., *binding*) grounds among the great variety of interpretations of the world which appear to be possible. Krüger describes Heidegger's project thus:

> Even in accepting from the start the dubiousness [*Fragwürdigkeit*] of all truth as the unavoidable fate of being human, he wants to obtain the possibility of affirming one determinate historical possibility of existence, despite its dubious nature. He who has affirmed that possibility, which in no case can be passed by, of meaningless death, can also venture to take up some one historical possibility

of existence, even though this possibility is exposed to the danger, as history moves along, of coming to nothing.[32]

Even though there is no mention here of any principle allowing us to differentiate between possible interpretations of the world, we are supposedly nonetheless enabled to transcend being frozen by indecision. But in the absence of such a principle, it may appear that this transcending of indecision can only have been accomplished by making an arbitrary (and so nihilistic) decision about which sinking ship to board.

How are we to view this declaration of the *Fragwürdigkeit alles Wahren*? Does it immediately smack of nihilism? Merely accepting *Fragwürdigkeit* (the worth/dignity of questioning) doesn't seem to be objectionable. Relinquishing indubitability as the only standard of truth is not necessarily nihilistic, but is arguably necessary to avoid nihilism.[33] Renouncing all scientific, rigorous method of investigation, abandonment to mere choosing on the basis of purely *conventional-volitional* (*geworfen-entwerfend*) standards – supposing this were a perspicuous way to gloss the existential structure at the heart of *Entschlossenheit* – would be a different matter. But to arrive at the latter position would be to arrive at a state of self-transparence that in terms of Dasein-analysis could only be called a 'free-floating construction', inasmuch as the finality involved would free Dasein from being an issue for itself at the most fundamental level of its Being. To

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[32] "Und eben indem er diese Fragwürdigkeit alles Wahren von vornherein als das unvermeidliche Schicksal des Menschseins übernimmt, will er die Möglichkeit gewinnen, eine bestimmte geschichtliche Möglichkeit der Existenz trotz ihrer Fragwürdigkeit zu bejahen. Wer die unüberholbare Möglichkeit des sinnlosen Todes bejaht hat, der kann es auch wagen, eine geschichtliche Möglichkeit der Existenz zu ergreifen, obwohl sie der Gefahr ausgesetzt ist, im Laufe der Geschichte zu scheitern" (Krüger 212/213).

[33] The necessary consequence of insisting on indubitability being a resort to some kind of positivistic philosophy and as Ricoeur says: "le positivisme laisse l'historicisme hors de lui et l'engendre comme sa contre-partie inéluctable" (Ricoeur 26) – positivism treats historicism as irrelevant to its own affairs, thus engendering historicism as its own ineluctable counterpart. This kind of historicism, since it is merely the inevitable *negative reaction* to positivism, is necessarily nihilistic.

propose any interpretation of Dasein as something to be generally accepted requires *existenziell* confirmation. Is this to be found in the 'meaninglessness of death'? That the near-universal testimony of human cultures to the meaningfulness of the event of death should now be considered universally otiose is clearly not a proposition that can be grounded in a sober *existenzial* analysis of Dasein.[34]

Why, then, should *this* particular *Bejahung* (affirmation, approval of, positive attitude towards *die unüberholbare Möglichkeit des sinnlosen Todes*) enable such an *ergreifen* (seizing, grasping, gripping, taking up)?

Certainly this affirmation cannot decide whether the event of death is in itself meaningless [*sinnlos*], but only that it is not to be passed by, not to be overtaken [*unüberholbar*]. Death must be faced if there is to be meaning in the whole – if I choose not to face the fact that *I am*, only and always, in the face of death/on the way to death, such a choice bears sure witness to the fact that I am fleeing my ownmost existence. "If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering [and death]. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete" (Frankl 88). I may well still seek to find meaning in life, but to do so while ignoring the fact that death is a phenomenon of life[35] will ensure that the meaning I find will not be the meaning of *my own* life, but a deceptive abstraction.[36] Death is a point of reference that not only provides the universality of a

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[34] Such a conclusion would appear much more to be the reactionary interpretation of a factical situation wherein Dasein, in its absorption in the alienation and angst prevailing in our technological age, has been uprooted from its autochtonous heritage.

[35] "Der Tod im weitesten Sinne ist ein Phänomen des Lebens" (SZ 246) – death, in the widest sense, is a phenomenon of life.

[36] Cp. Viktor Frankl's experience as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps: "[Most of my comrades'] question was, 'Will we survive the camp? For, if not, all this suffering has no meaning.' The question which beset me was, 'Has all this suffering, this dying around us, a meaning? For, if not, then ultimately

common event which must always figure into the totality of meaning of Dasein's projective understanding, but this limit of our existence, this possibility of ceasing to be, is emblematic of Dasein's own finiteness: all of its pursuits, even that of striving to transcend its own finiteness and to enter into/grow into/bring-to-maturity a relation with the infinite Other, nonetheless take place within, are projected within, this limited, personal horizon.

Death can be regarded as *meaningless* insofar (and only insofar) as the *anticipation* [*vorwegnehmen*] of death is in certain respects impossible. The way in which I am able to anticipate what is involved in my own death is different from that which is possible in regard to other anticipated events, revealing in a special way my finiteness, my not-Godness, the possibility that the openness of my Being will be definitively closed off and with this all that I take to be meaningful will cease to be. Death, a most familiar phenomenon of life insofar as *others* are always dying, remains awe-fully, mysteriously alien. In certain circumstances, I might be able to matter-of-factly anticipate: tomorrow I will die; but this anticipation uniquely cuts off further anticipating; it is impossible to think of dying as just one of the many things I plan to do 'some day.' All Dasein's pursuits (all of its *care*) are more or less directly related to this limit event. Reflection on our comportment towards death makes evident both our tendency to flee from our ownmost selves (in this case our ownmost death), and our need, nonetheless, to freely confront and appropriate (take up – *ergreifen*) for our ownmost selves the meaning of life as a whole. Even those who aver the meaninglessness of life are confronted, in the phenomenon of death, with the possibility that each life is a totality that might after all be

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there is no meaning to survival; for a life whose meaning depends upon such a happenstance – as whether one escapes or not – ultimately would not be worth living at all'" (Frankl 138).

meaningful (or at least *might have been* meaningful), even if that meaning has been reduced in particular cases to a freely chosen exercise in self-frustration, a choice (which is always '*my*' choice) to thwart what is meaningful, the rational that is actual (good, noble, beautiful) through absorption in brute, meaningless facts (cf. Fackenheim's ARRA).

§8. The fittingness of responsibility

If a finite seizing of some possibility of existence is possible, then, through authentically reflecting on death, nonetheless it may appear, as Fackenheim points out, that "any *historical claim to* existenziell *authenticity may have its own* existenzial *interpretation*" (HTPT 87). Fackenheim seems to imply here that an *existenzial* interpretation, to make good its claim to *transcendence*, must accommodate (and must *permit*) *every* historical claim to "*existenziell* authenticity," and can do so only by resorting to a pure formality emptied of all content. Does this mean, then, that any self-interpretation of Dasein, however execrable, might constitute, might be counted as, an '*historical claim to* existenziell *authenticity*'? Does it mean that our *existenzial* interpretation, necessarily empty of content, must be incapable of providing guidance to our resolute projecting of some one determinate possibility, one that aims to be 'fitting' [*schicklich*]?

As a matter of fact, certain projections arrive without fail in Dasein's historical horizon; although they are 'merely' projections of Dasein, they pervade Dasein's actual horizon such that they can only be escaped by willful denial, turning away. "There are some things which every *existenziell* understanding 'includes', even if these are only pre-ontological – that is to say, not conceived theoretically or thematically" (BT 360). Such is the projection of Dasein as Being-toward-death, and *responsibility* [*Schuld*] is likewise intrinsic to Dasein's Being-as-care [*Sorge*]. If Dasein is *care* and cannot but recognize its responsibility, its indebtedness in terms of what it is and understands, to being, then

authentic Dasein cannot be indifferent, cannot allow *indifferently* that any historical 'view' whatsoever may make a claim to *existenziell* authenticity.[37]

But how does this address Fackenheim's more specific criticism of Heidegger: that his stance of resolute openness to being is possible only because he fails to hear the screams (or the silence) from the gas chambers? "Only because in his *Seinsverlassenheit* the screams of the children and the silence of the *Muselmänner* are not heard is there any possibility of adopting toward the age, as the ultimate philosophical stance, a 'composure' that 'lets things be'" (TMW 190). But how could such deafness have any essential relation to *existenzial* analysis/historicity? Surely such analysis doesn't cut us off from these screams? Indeed, one of the fundamental concepts arising from Heidegger's analysis is that of responsibility, and so we might well expect that this *should include* a responsibility to listen to the world-historical significance of these victims.

To address this issue, the notion of responsibility here warrants closer analysis: Although we cannot escape the fact of our general responsibility, our responsibility is for the most part apprehended in the mode of falling. Thus, although we recognize that we are responsible, the content of this responsibility, just 'how responsible' one is required to be, the extent to which one must recognize one's indebtedness, and the way in which one must 'repay' this debt, is determined *zunächst und zumeist* by reference to whatever happens to be generally accepted, while at the same time this inauthentic determination is *zunächst und zumeist* covered up and interpreted as *die Selbstverständlichkeit der Sache selbst*.

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[37] And this applies too where there is no such claim *because there is no explicit understanding* of *existenziell authenticity* as such, but where such a claim might nonetheless be attributed (projected) retrospectively, so to speak.

In a pluralistic society there are clear opportunities to see the need, grounded in our responsibility, for authentic resolve [*eigentliche Entschlossenheit*] (how else is one to take up some particular view with regard to which one decides to be responsible?). But specifically in *liberal-democratic* pluralistic societies, the tendency for the call to authenticity to be obscured may well become all the more powerful. An appeal to the insuperable ambivalence of values canonizes the dominion of inauthenticity by ensuring that a mood of ambivalence is universalized and taken up unreflectively in average everyday thinking. Thus the possibility offered by pluralism for authenticity is covered over by insisting that only one possible apprehension of values (one that is determined to be cautiously ambivalent) is truly responsible, authentic, and by rejecting *a priori* all non-ambivalent projections of moral understanding, branding them as intolerant/archaic/etc.

In this case, we fail for the most part to take responsibility for our responsibility. Thus the notion of *authenticity* is not required to *restore* a sense of *responsibility*, as if this had been entirely absent, or to open up our ontic interpretations of responsibility in order to change the content of prevailing moral norms, as if recognizing my *own* responsibility for my moral understanding should imply that I am free to manipulate that horizon for my own benefit or according to my own whims. Instead the notion of authenticity points to the fact that whatever my understanding, it is not a matter of indifference, but inescapably a projection that is my own and implicates my own-most self as responsible. Regardless of whether I will ultimately stand before God as accountable [*zurechnungsfähig*], I stand nonetheless before *das Nichts*, insofar as there is nothing that can decide for me the way in which I will face or flee my ownmost responsibility – it is only in the face of *das Nichts* that I become *nicht-Nichts*, that I am

able to establish a projected horizon of understanding in authentic anticipation and resolve.

If we fail to grasp a *lastingly true possibility*, we are left with the need to choose one that is not lasting; but in grasping the end-limit of our possibilities/potentialities of Being-in-the-world, we are offered a substitute for the *infinite* fullness/ comprehensiveness sought in eternal truths: the fullness or comprehensiveness of our horizon can now be fulfilled by consciously, resolutely stepping into the fullness of a projection of existence which is grounded in my owned projection, a projection which I am enabled to embrace because I am its ground and it includes my own uttermost possibility, my *im*-possibility [*Un*-Möglichkeit], my death.[38] In this resolute projection I appropriate, make my own, the fact that I am responsible. I must confront what is essential to this responsibility: First, that my projection is thrown [*geworfen*], that is, it is only made possible on the basis of a context that I did *not* choose and for which I am *not*

[38] Kruger writes: "gerade derjenige, ... der den »Mut zur Angst« hat, ist der Mensch, der »eigentlich« existiert, d.h. er ist derjenige, der sich dieses fragwürdige Dasein als sein eigenes zueigen macht und es so, wie es nun einmal ist, »übernimmt«. Zu dieser eigentlichen Existenz gehört das »Vorlaufen zur äußersten Möglichkeit«, d. h. das Leben angesichts der im Tode enthüllten Sinnlosigkeit des Daseins; zu ihr gehört also die Entschlossenheit, dies auszuhalten, daß die Möglichkeit der menschlichen Existenz plötzlich einmal abbricht und in schlechthinnige Unmöglichkeit umschlägt; man weiß zwar nicht wann, man weiß aber bestimmt, daß dies geschehen wird. Und erst wer entschlossen zu dieser »Möglichkeit der maßlosen Unmöglichkeit der Existenz« vorläuft, ist grundsätzlich imstande, zu einer konkreten Möglichkeit menschlicher Existenz zu kommen; erst wer so den Verzicht auf alle ewigen Wahrheiten vollzogen hat, ist imstande, sich für eine der vielen ererbten Möglichkeiten der geschichtlichen Existenz zu entscheiden, vor denen die Historisten unentschieden stehen blieben, weil keine ihnen als die bleibend wahre faßbar wurde" (Krüger 212). [Precisely that person who has the 'courage to be anxious' is the one who 'authentically' exists, i.e., he is the one who appropriates to himself this questionable existence/Dasein as his own, and in this way, 'takes it over,' so to speak. To this authentic existence belongs the 'anticipation of the uttermost possibility,' i.e., life in view of the meaninglessness of existence/Dasein that is unveiled in death. To this authentic existence belongs also then, the resoluteness to hold in view the fact that the possibility of human existence may suddenly disintegrate and become sheer impossibility. One knows not when, but one knows with certainty, that this will happen. And only he who resolutely advances to meet this 'possibility of the boundless impossibility of existence' is fundamentally in a position to approach a concrete possibility of human existence. Only he who has thus fulfilled the renunciation of all eternal truths is in a position to embrace one of the many inherited possibilities of historical existence, before which the historicists froze in indecision, because of their inability to grasp any of them as lastingly true.]

responsible (although insofar as I recognize my involvement in constituting the historical-existential situation, I accept some degree of responsibility here too). And second, that my projection is determined in an everyday context that is constituted by falling, by the inescapable average everyday interpretation of *das Man*. We recognize both that this thrown self, that projects, is not primarily my owned self, but the 'they-self'; and at the same time that I am never dominated through and through by this unownedness.

If Dasein's situation is so inherently conflictual, an eventual resort to a relativistic attitude may seem almost inevitable. How am I to extricate from my thrown, unowned projecting, an authentic projection of what is truly true, and how could one such projection in all soberness be maintained *against* all others – surely I would do violence to the truth in assuming a dogmatic, or even decisive, attitude towards such finite projections? But this is an incomplete way of framing the problem, as Krüger explains:

> Heidegger sees that relativistic indecision is an absurdity, that man cannot be man, existing in some 'there,' without holding fast to some determinate possibility of historical life; he understands that a relativistic attitude in general is only possible because such an attitude confines itself to sitting back and watching, a kind of 'aesthetic humanism,' and forgets, beyond that, the necessity of taking part in history.[39]

[39] "Heidegger erkennt also, daß die relativistische Unentschiedenheit ein Unding ist, daß der Mensch als Mensch gar nicht da sein kann, ohne sich an eine bestimmte Möglichkeit des geschichtlichen Lebens zu halten; er durchschaut, daß die relativistische Haltung überhaupt nur möglich ist, weil sie sich im Sinne des

But in insisting that we remember *the necessity of taking part in history*, in what way is the relativistic attitude rendered impossible? In the sense that it is impossible to be satisfied with the impoverished kind of existence resulting from taking a purely relativistic attitude towards all reality, in particular towards ultimate values?[40] But perhaps this impoverishment is merely correlative of the fact that the relativistic attitude is fundamentally viciously circular, that it necessarily absolutizes itself, closes in upon itself, making itself the last word; it is only possible on the tacit assumption that all objects are merely objects for some subject, and the fact - so unavoidable in the context of our concrete lives (our *Mittun in der Geschichte*) - that the primary intentional object of all of our projections, of all truths, is *die Sache selbst*, not merely or primarily some representation 'in' me, is rejected *a priori*, with no justification for such a foreclosure of the question to be found.

But how can resoluteness avoid this kind of illegitimate foreclosure of the horizon of Being? It certainly appears that in resolutely projecting just *one* possibility, there is certainly a *closing-off* of our horizon as I grant myself the right to turn away from, to neglect, all *other* possibilities. As Rosen asks, "how are we to distinguish resoluteness from deluded stubbornness?" (N 133). But in some degree this closing-off is inevitable and as such can hardly be dismissed *a priori* as deluded stubbornness. No matter what beliefs I choose to hold, I choose not to hold others and so I close myself off to them in

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ästhetischen Humanismus auf das Zuschauen beschränkt und darüber die Notwendigkeit des Mittuns in der Geschichte vergißt" (Krüger 212).

[40] If so, part of this impoverishment might result precisely from the demand to abstain from 'eternal truths,' at least insofar as this could be interpreted as a refusal of faith and hope in those matters which escape our finite horizon – i.e., a full comprehension of what constitutes our true 'highest' desires, as well as the realization of those desires. Thus in whatever sense it is that we abstain from *ewigen Wahrheiten*, we may well hope to leave room, from the 'there' of our own ever-finite existence, to authentically reach out to the infinite, universal, absolute - that which we *are* not, but may strive towards. (Cp. N 217 ff.)

some measure. Even if the very thing I try to do is hold myself open to all beliefs (as does the relativist), I am faced with inevitable failure: my stance of remaining in a position of radical openness to all beliefs is indistinguishable from (and implicitly constitutive of) the belief, itself thoroughly exclusionary, that *one must not reject any belief*; thus, despite the intention to remain open to all beliefs, in truth I naïvely close myself off from all positions of belief which *do* admit to rejecting other beliefs. I cannot have my cake, untouched, *and* eat it too; indeed the *only* way to really have beliefs, to be assured that they are real and palatable and mine, is *in* living them ('eating' them). As Heidegger puts it, I always have my *Being* precisely *to be*.

In contrast to the naïve 'inclusiveness' of relativism, then, the virtue of authentic *Entschlossenheit* is found in its insistence that the way in which Dasein takes up an understanding projection of the world, is truly a *way* – a way which we have set out upon and which has been set upon us, and which is *constitutive* of our own *essence*. The notion of a 'way' expresses concretely the open-endedness of our conception of the Being of Dasein and its variety of layers of meaning: there is a suggestion of being guided, as we are guided by following a road, of directedness; the promise of a destination, or the danger of getting lost; of following others, of going in company, or of stepping out alone, whether this aloneness is in the midst of a crowd or goes along some forsaken or untrodden path. The essential in the concept of *Entschlossenheit* is shown, in terms of this metaphor, in that we are *on* the way, not above it indifferently gazing at the view. Even if the way one chooses is towards a kind of 'oriental' mystical enlightened indifference to the world, according to which all beliefs are equally illusory, it is no less the case that one may take responsibility for taking this path or fail to do so. Being responsible for taking

this path requires that I not take for granted that I did not take *that* one; and of course that in either case it was *I* who did so, not alone to be sure, but as Dasein, with all that is entailed by the coming-to-presence of my existentiality (i.e., that which is revealed in *existenzial* analysis). Only in this way can I be responsible, in the resolve to take up a possibility of my existence in a way that is not wholly self-absorbed, but which remains aware of the status of this resolute projection as that chosen by and for me, chosen within the destining of my own Being; for which I was responsible in the choosing and for which I remain responsible, whether in its resolute maintenance, or in its abandonment. The ultimate meaning of the way is personal, its resolution being found only in the way of the individual. Even if we speak of a definitive manifestation of 'the Way' in history, as in Christianity, it remains nonetheless essentially tied to individual persons. Likewise, if we speak of the dialectical development of nature, spirit, and idea, even if this should come to be manifested on a world-historical level, and so in a largely inauthentic way, such development can only be maintained or safeguarded on the way of authentic Dasein. This world-historical presencing, i.e., factical situation, which is the context of Dasein's thrownness, is maintained only insofar as Dasein ventures to re-enact the spiritual feats that established this situation, where the possibilities inherent in a particular spiritual heritage are disclosed as such.

There is a kind of relativism which states, in a purely negative way, that no possible projection of the truth can claim any special status. On this basis one typically concludes, in a naïve, unarticulated way, that I need not understand my position as one of responsibility towards any particular understanding of reality, even the one I myself happen to be (inauthentically) projecting, and which I *am* projecting, apparently, for the

sole reason that such projecting is the unavoidable essence of Dasein (of myself). In contrast to this, resoluteness towards a possibility that is chosen by me *as* such, and thence *as* an act of choice for which I recognize my own responsibility, requires that I at the same time see that I must also accept responsibility for my negative choices: I would have been responsible for not choosing this possibility, if I had in fact rejected it, and I am responsible for all other possibilities, insofar as I did in fact reject them, even if this rejection is not in the manner of an explicit repudiation but only of neglect, indifference, or abandonment.[41] Resoluteness towards my ownmost being, for which I will-to-understand my own responsibility (will-to-have-a-conscience), requires that I see that my own being is at stake in the 'negativity' of my projecting. The apparent randomness to which we are consigned in making our *geworfen-entwerfend* way to the truth calls for an authentically decisive response. In the context of Dasein-analysis, responsibility cannot be thought of as free-floating, an abstract, perhaps oppressive, presence, but must be understood as being effective in and through the particularity of our own way. In order to be responsible toward itself or towards the others among whom we dwell who are absorbed in different existential projects (*Entwürfe*), this way must be an owned way, understood in each case in its mineness (its *Jemeinigkeit*). Responsibility grounded in authentic *Entschlossenheit* thus provides a necessary counterthrust to the leveling out of particularity that results from the reflex to determine my responsibility by what others take to be their responsibility, to determine our standards (our *rem ad quo*, that to which

[41] And the notion of 'choosing' that should be understood in this context is also only loosely tied to its usual 'explicit' connotations of self-conscious, affirmative volition.

we adequate our intellects) merely by the pervasive average-everyday ideals of modern mass culture.[42]

[42] We can take, as an example of this, the *legalistic* determination of responsibility described by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: "A society which is based [i.e., wherein *responsibility* is based] on the letter of the law and never reaches any higher is taking very scarce advantage of the high level of human possibilities.... Whenever the tissue of life is woven of legalistic relations, there is an atmosphere of moral mediocrity, paralyzing man's noblest impulses" ("A World Split Apart" [1978 Harvard Commencement Address]).

§9. A potential objection to *existenzial* responsibility as self-referential

Though Dasein is not in the first place 'responsible for' (the cause of) its own responsibility, once it comes to understand this responsibility – that in its ownmost potentiality it *is*, precisely, *to be responsible* – there appears to be nothing in view which determines the limits of this call to responsibility or gives it any definite shape. But perhaps we should hasten to temper this view in light of the existential analysis that first led us to the analysis of responsibility: the kind of responsibility which is an essential moment or characteristic of Dasein's existence is precisely a highly circumscribed responsibility, characterized just as importantly by our lack of responsibility as by our responsibility.[43] Of course, when faced with this issue of the degree of our responsibility, one might well hope for something more instructive than a pat response: "of course there must be limits." It could well be that "there must be," but saying so does little to clarify our actual position, which might easily be seen as a rather difficult one: the constitutive moments of Dasein, the inescapable falling of its average everydayness, may be taken as reason to think that the notion of responsibility, though indeed genuinely traceable in its phenomenal sources, can hardly be a notion that can justifiably be viewed as normative or that could hope to play a guiding role in the way in which we undertake to reflectively understand the nature of our Being, or of Being in general. The self-conscious act of choosing to project our understanding in accordance with some possibility that lies open to our view, and doing so because we realize that some such projecting (whatever, in

[43] So much so that it is possible for the question to arise whether we are at all responsible – whether perhaps the sole meaning of our freedom consists in a kind of empty phenomenality that has nothing to do with responsibility, and whether this lack may be due to our entirely depraved state (i.e., "the bondage of the will") or because various dogmas of determinism – mechanistic, psychological, historical, cultural, theological – might be correct.

particular, it may consist of) is precisely the very unavoidable essence of our Being, appears to be a brute fact for which we can take no responsibility. Perhaps this kind of *choosing* renders any correlative concept of *responsibility* cold and bloodless, making the pair *choosing/responsibility* mutually parasitic, sentenced together to death by their necessity of feeding *only* upon each other. Why might this be so?

We might think of our *need to choose* as the *ratio cognoscendi* of our *responsibility*, and *responsibility* as the *ratio essendi* of *being called to choose*. The *choice* under examination here is a choice of and for one's self (both authentic and inauthentic, owned and unowned self); the correlative responsibility, then, must correspond to the kind of choice involved: insofar as it is a choice of and for oneself, and it is only *one's self* that functions as the criterion of choice, the only responsibility entailed is to one's self: *that I have a choice demonstrates my responsibility*, and *it is my responsibility as such that demands that I make a choice*. My obligation in making this choice then, it appears, must be made on the basis of my recognition of my responsibility to do so, not on the basis of any value/duty/obligation/call that transcends the fact/act of my choosing. Thus any choice will qualify as responsible and the notion of responsibility ceases to have any meaning. Similarly when Heidegger says: "Resoluteness constitutes the *loyalty* of existence to its own Self" (BT 443), can loyalty to my own Self be made sense of here? Certainly on some interpretations of my self, this notion appears to make sense: where my destiny, my purpose, the conditions of my fulfillment (and conversely, of my dereliction), are *given by an-other,* or *given absolutely* or *transcendently*, I can be true to my own self, since I can be false. But is Heidegger not in the difficult position of maintaining that precisely what is given by true existential analysis is that there are no

such givens? And without some kind of fixed criteria, how can I possibly *fail* to be true to my own self, to 'choose' 'responsibly'?

But this would contradict the *Richtungssinn* – the sense of directedness – of our (self-)understanding (of what it means to perceive[44]). Despite its formal structure – that my responsibility to choose myself, consists in choosing to be responsible – the choosing of myself is not a kind of 'first entry' on a blank slate, but is rather an interpretative affirmation of what always already appears. The articulation of *Sein* (of *realitas*, *existentia*) doesn't diminish the richness of *das Seiende* (of the real, of the existent). The openness of Being [*Erschlossenheit des Seins*] doesn't bring about the uncoveredness of beings [*Entdecktheit des Seienden*], but rather makes clear for the first time how such *Entdecktheit* is possible. The difficulty here, then, should be addressed in a way attuned to the circumscriptions proper to the subtle circularity of Heidegger's project:[45]

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[44] Cf. GPP 100: "Bei der ersten Charakteristik des intentum, dessen, worauf die Wahrnehmung sich richtet, galt es gegenüber den subjektivistischen Mißdeutungen, daß das Wahrnehmen zunächst sich nur auf Subjektives, d.h. Empfindungen richtet, zu zeigen, daß die Wahrnehmung auf Vorhandenes selbst gerichtet ist. Bei dieser Gelegenheit sagten wir, wir brauchen, um das zu sehen, nur die in der Wahrnehmung selbst liegende Erfassungstendenz oder ihren Richtungssinn zu befragen. Seinem Richtungssinn nach intendiert das Wahrnehmen Vorhandenes in seiner Vorhandenheit. Es gehört zum Richtungssinn, d.h. die intention ist ausgerichtet auf das Entdecken von Vorhandenem in seiner Vorhandenheit. In ihr selbst liegt schon ein Verständnis von Vorhandenheit, wenn auch nur ein vorbegriffliches." [With regard to the first characteristic of the *intentum*, of that to which perception directs itself, it was worth pointing out (over against the subjectivistic misinterpretation that perceiving is proximally directed to something subjective, that is, to 'inner sensations') that perception is directed to the thing itself, which is present. On that occasion we said that in order to see this we need only inquire into that tendency of our apprehending – the sense of this tendency's directedness – that lies in perception itself. According to its sense-of-directedness, our perceiving intends the thing present, in its present-ness. It belongs to the sense-of-directedness, i.e., the intention is directed out onto the uncovering of things that are present in their present-ness. An understanding of present-ness [i.e., of a thing's being there, existing], even if this understanding is pre-conceptual, is already found in this directional meaning.]

[45] Heidegger's methodology requires that we follow the process of his analysis so that that which appears is allowed to appear *an ihm selbst von ihm selbst her* [in itself, from out of itself]. It is not possible to start with his conclusion and to evaluate it according to criteria of formal consistency. (And the same should apply to the evaluation of all positions – one must appropriate the originary disclosure that led to the position in question by tracing the path for oneself of the phenomenological analysis in question.) So our first cut of Heidegger's position must start at the appropriate place, and presumably this starting point can only be determined on the basis of a resolve to follow in the path taken and marked out by Heidegger and to experience, if possible, the force of the same phenomena which guided his thinking. Only in this way can

Heidegger is attempting to establish, in a provisional way, the ontological analytic of the Being of Dasein; that is, he is attempting to lay out the essential structures that constitute Dasein's horizon of understanding. This is not an attempt to make pronouncements on the ontical elements of that understanding, elements such as those that we are wont to think of in terms of 'the purpose of my life' or what it means to 'live well' or 'live badly.' Rather, he want to prepare a horizon for our understanding in which it is possible for what is intended by such designations to appear in itself, from out of itself, to be appropriated truly, as that which is.

At first sight, it appears that a description of these kinds of *structural* elements shaping our understanding would involve neutral descriptions of the way things are, rather than normative prescriptions. How, then, are the apparently normative elements that arise in such an investigation to be grounded? In presuming to speak of loyalty, one necessarily grants the legitimacy of speaking of its opposite, a breach of loyalty, or betrayal; and surely these are normative, ethical terms? Perhaps what shows itself here is that Heidegger's ontological investigation is ultimately, profoundly ethical – directed to the ethos of reflective thinking. Perhaps the resort to apparently ethical language is related to (or necessitated by) the attempt to bring to light a saying of Being that denies to reason a grasp of transcendent truth, because it has (re)discovered the 'in-the-world' separation of the spheres of transcendence and rationality: Insofar as, in Hegel's words, reason has become 'actual' in the world,[46] its transcendence can only be ethical, that is, a

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we understand the grounds of his conclusion and evaluate the appropriateness and adequacy of various criticisms.

[46] And we will set aside here the "vast and intricate difficulties bound up with the distinction between such worldly events as do, and such as do not, manifest a divine Presence [or 'reason'], [difficulties which] concern the correct conception of the distinction, and even more the correct identification of instances … [and which] do not concern the fact and necessity of a distinction as such" (ARRA 694).

way that must be walked, a task that must be accomplished, not a *fait accompli*.[47] What is actually at stake, then, in this ethical call to transcendence is the bringing-to-presence and safeguarding of reason, reason attuned to Dasein's (our) *actual*, and not merely 'apparent,' existence. This is hardly a matter to be characterized by its 'pointlessness.' Although Heidegger may refuse, or be unable, to put 'the point' of dwelling in nearness to Being into words, such a refusal or inability cannot be counted as reason to dismiss the imperative of a thinking that seeks to evoke insight into 'what is actual' ['*was wirklich ist*'], and avoid merely adding to the stock of sayings available for analysis.

[47] Cp. Heidegger: "Aber wie soll der modus des Entdeckens durch das zu entdeckende Seiende und seine Seinsart gleichsam normiert und vorgezeichnet werden, wenn nicht so, daß das Seiende selbst zuvor entdeckt ist, damit sich der Modus des erfassens nach ihm richten kann? *Andererseits* soll dieses Entdecken sich *wiederum dem zu entdeckenden Seienden anmessen*" (GPP 99, emphasis added). [But how should the mode of uncovering become, as it were, normalized and prescribed on the basis of the being to be uncovered and its way of Being, unless the being itself is uncovered beforehand, so that our mode of grasping/apprehending is able to direct itself toward the being in question. *On the other hand*, this uncovering should *in turn conform* itself *to the being to be uncovered*.] It is this *in turn conforming* that always remains as the task/*ethos*/dwelling of thinking.

§10. Clarification of the project of 'fundamental ontology'

At one level then, we appear to grant the legitimacy of Fackenheim's complaint – in some measure we have recommended decisiveness [*Entschlossenheit*] without discussing any of the decisions we must be decisive towards. Nonetheless, the point of *existenzial* analysis has been that of a general preparation for making decisions that will be fitting and meaningful, given our way of being. The philosopher, then, may still be inclined to dismiss 'fundamental ontology' as being of merely tangential interest or of no concern whatsoever to philosophical projects. Fundamental ontology may still appear to be merely a propaedeutic to philosophy, not something to be dwelled upon: Perhaps it is true that we *need* not philosophize about beings so as to seek truth that is universal and unconditioned, but the transcendent historicity of Being yields no warrant for the claim that we *must* not; perhaps philosophy must presuppose the traditional desiderata of philosophical inquiry, as the necessary precondition of its own possibility (cp. Strauss: the philosophical pursuit of unconditioned truth may have a "merely conditional character", but "are the conditions in question not necessarily fulfilled?" (Strauss 22)). Just as Dasein's everyday 'falling' tendency to interpret itself on the basis of things that it is not is a genuine, positively constitutive feature of Dasein (though *uneigentlich*, this is still our *self* – cf. GPP 228), there can be no objection against the genuine, positive, systematic projects of *wissenschaftliche Denken* [scientific thinking], which might be taken up in an authentic projection only occasionally and piecemeal.

This dismissal seems natural enough when Heidegger's 'overcoming of philosophy' seems to presuppose a move to a level of thinking which proceeds on the

basis of incommensurable terms. As Fackenheim puts it: "Heidegger's sternness, if it is somehow wanting, must show itself to be so internally, *not merely be judged as such by an external testimony*" (TMW 165 [emphasis added]). But if Heidegger's transition to 'another level,' which is supposedly such that merely 'external' attacks are in vain, is nonetheless accomplished by an appropriation of traditional epistemology (of the history of western philosophy), then such thinking, though indeed 'new,' is also a more *penetrating appropriation* of the tradition, not simply a turning-aside from it. And the 'newness' of the position achieved by an originary thinking of being is accidental to the *Sache* of the thinking itself (unless the 'working out' of such thinking is merely being catalogued with regard to its place in the history of ideas or described in terms of an ontical explanation of the development of human capacities for thought). Heidegger's thinking does not attempt to point out phenomena that have been simply absent in the history of Being, but rather ones that have been obscured, which offer themselves in the mode of *semblance* [*Schein*]. Though *zunächst und zumeist* we may be *estranged* from thinking Being, we are never *strangers* to this, our own essence. Such an examination of Being, within and 'beyond' traditional epistemology, remains a self-examination by a thinking within the space of Being. A 'new vision' cannot be constituted in the forgetting of the old without losing its hold on the 'world' (openness of Being) wherein it is historically situated and which is the only possible place for its own realization.

We should not see it as, strictly speaking, *possible* to mount a critique and analysis of philosophical thinking that is truly 'from outside' – we can no more be 'outside' philosophical thinking, that we can be outside Being. In the framework of *Being and Time*, overcoming philosophy should only be understood as overcoming a forgetting

or concealedness, as a repudiation of traditional metaphysics only in the sense of a making room within an understanding of Being whereby, although there may have been the pretension of saying something definitive, this was done only by illegitimately imposing limits. We can compare to this Heidegger's critique of technology, which is not Luddism, a call to banish all technology, nor an attempt to master technology. Instead he seeks to bring it about that we have some freedom in the relationships we take up. False pretensions to mastery, whether of reason or of technology, must be an issue for genuine thinking, that is, on traditional philosophy's *own* terms, even if it often remains easy for contemporary philosophers to ignore this realization.

The importance of philosophy's confronting its ontological rootedness is a result of philosophy's own demand for a thinking that is universal rather than fragmented (cp. Strauss 17). But in what can this demand consist if Heidegger's analysis of the finite Being of Dasein is correct? Is this call for universality rendered impossible by the construal of Being as *revealing-concealing Appropriation*, or is some kind of universality what makes possible any kind of intelligible articulation of such *Appropriation*? A true appropriation of a projection must have a quality of universality, since this is inherent to Dasein's understanding. This understanding is not omniscient, but insofar as it does understand, this understanding must aim at sufficiency, in accordance with its own measure. Insofar as the world constituted by Dasein is its 'universe,' the limits of Dasein's world and the limits of the universe must coincide. To think of the universe as some kind of infinite extension (spatially or conceptually), within some small region of which Dasein has its world of understanding, would be to be misled by a spatial metaphor. Though there are many things we will never bump into, these *are* still within

the universe that is given to our understanding: they are negatively given precisely as those things which we will never bump into, as those things that we acknowledge by our humility, by admitting that our own understanding is limited. Only in acknowledging that certain matters transcend our understanding is it possible to maintain that the fundamental orientation of our understanding is universal in its scope.[48]

48 And to this claim we can add, by way of caveat, a passage from Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism": "We encounter beings as actualities in a calculative businesslike way, but also scientifically and by way of philosophy, with explanations and proofs. Even the assurance that something is inexplicable belongs to these explanations and proofs. With such statements we believe that we confront the mystery. As if it were already decided that the truth of being lets itself at all be established in causes and explanatory grounds or, what comes to the same, in their incomprehensibility" (LH 243).

§11. The status and possibility of *philosophia perennis*

This said, how does it stand with Heidegger's rejection of the *philosophia perennis*? Löwith asks:

> In the metaphysics of absolute spirit become history-of-spirit, that which gives the appearance of an undogmatic openness, is actually an abdication of philosophy in favor of its historicity. Which other science would have ever made its own history its primary theme, instead of the truly knowable?[49]

And yet insofar as philosophy makes a claim to be enlightened by universal reason, there should be a common source of all philosophy throughout history and we can say, in response to Löwith's question, that there is good reason to focus on history as a means to appropriating the voice of reason precisely in its universality. Besides, philosophy is no ordinary *Wissenschaft*: its aim is to understand the whole and to do so as a constitutive part of that whole (not as a kind of external examiner); it is only *necessary* that philosophy be occupied with self-examination in a way that other sciences are not. To some extent other *Wissenschaften* can quite legitimately take for granted their own subject matter and methodology as given and develop inquiries and theories within their domains as a matter of course – it is beyond the ken of these sciences to be self-reflective, to address the problem of understanding the purpose of their own drive to construct theories and to gain knowledge. In developing various theories that aim to explain the evolutionary history of a species, scientists treat the development of such an account

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[49] "Was in der zur Geistesgeschichte gewordenen Metaphysik des absoluten Geistes wie eine undogmatische Offenheit aussieht, ist in Wirklichkeit eine Abdankung der Philosophie an ihre Geschichtlichkeit. Welche andere Wissenschaft hätte je statt des wahrhaft Wißbaren ihre eigene Geschichte zum primären Thema gemacht?" (Löwith 11).

rather like an end in itself. The scientist may labor under the belief that the development of such knowledge is intrinsically beneficial to human society; perhaps it frees us from 'superstitious' alternative accounts or opens up possibilities for extending our power over nature, or perhaps the scientist finds his work intrinsically fascinating. But the understanding of the final end (the end in itself), whatever it may be, towards which his work is directed is extrinsic to that work itself, and the scientist has, *as* scientist, no special competence in this regard. That is to say, he has no special competence in assigning a human meaning to the subject matter that he researches and develops: he deals only with technical meaning. Thus, *pace* Löwith, since the origin of philosophy is precisely in inquiring beyond various particular domains of being into the nature and significance of the whole, the true *Abdankung* of philosophy would be to measure itself by the standards of *die andere Wissenschaften*, which are by their very nature confined to some sub-set of beings.[50]

Certainly one way to aim at the whole is by aiming at a comprehension of history. At each point in history there is a particular reading of the significance of the whole, which to some extent grows out of the various evolving scientific fields present at that point in time – and this particular reading is philosophy. But by its very nature, in aiming at a comprehension of the whole, *this* particular point, from which the whole is viewed, must be oriented, as a matter of its central characteristic, towards the *totality* of points of view. Thus if philosophy takes its own history as its primary theme, this has a distinctive meaning relative to the very nature of philosophy, a meaning which has no parallel in

[50] Cf. Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism": the effort to justify philosophy by 'elevating' it to the rank of one of the 'sciences' "is the abandonment of the essence of thinking" (LH 240).

other sciences, where a craving for what is new (*Neu-gier*) is the rule and may rightly be considered a virtue.

Nonetheless, is the philosopher not called to transcend earlier viewpoints, to somehow enable himself to evaluate what has gone right and wrong in the historical development of philosophical inquiries? As Löwith writes:

> Even at the beginning of modernity, philosophy still thinks in a way that is very unmodern, unhistorical. Descartes differentiates the scientific knowledge of metaphysics and physics from the kind of knowledge, which, like all that which is a matter of historical facts, rests on mere tradition and hearsay. With respect to the subject matter of these other kinds of knowledge, the historian – the historian of Roman history, for example – has no advantage over Cicero's cook. Out of the mere history of philosophical doctrines, one cannot learn what is true and what false. And because an historical report of past ways of thinking yields no standard by which we could decide the only essential question, which opinions are true and which false, Descartes struggles to overturn the authority of Aristotle in scholastic metaphysics and physics. The one and only thing that matters for the philosophical will-to-know, is not to know what others at other times have thought and said about nature, but to see with one's own eyes and to research by means of experiment what nature itself is and always has been – in Aristotle's time no differently than in the time of Copernicus and Galileo.[51]

[51] "[A]uch am Beginn der Neuzeit denkt die Philosophie noch sehr unmodern, ungeschichtlich. Descartes unterscheidet die wissenschaftliche Erkenntnis der Metaphysik und Physik von demjenigen Wissen, das wie alles Historische auf bloßer Überlieferung und Hörensagen beruht. Was diese betrifft, so habe der Historiker, etwa der der römischen Geschichte, nichts voraus vor Ciceros Koch, und aus der bloßen

But this narration of events in the history of philosophy in fact illustrates the problem with *ungeschichtliche* philosophy. Describing *geschichtliche* philosophy Löwith says:

> Philosophy, then, can no longer posit an unconditional claim of truth; it must instead take over its historical situation, take over, that is, the ever-changing answers to correspondingly ever-changing questions; it must restrict itself to historical 'reflection,' 'understanding,' and 'interpreting.'[52]

But what is the alternative? To take up Löwith's example, indeed Descartes fought against the authority of Aristotle, rejecting his teleological view of nature; but what if Descartes' battle was, philosophically speaking, in vain, carried out against a 'straw man' misunderstanding of Aristotle?[53] Similarly, we can think of Luther, perhaps one of Descartes' more significant predecessors, and his doctrine of *sola scriptura*, of the sufficiency in the matter of doctrinal disputes of appealing *only* to the *Überlieferung* (tradition) found *mit eigenen Augen* (with one's own eyes) in holy writ, relying, thus, on the notion of the perspicuity of scripture. Regardless of the 'perspicuity of scripture,' it is obvious that there is no reason to think that the intellect of the individual interpreter of scripture must needs share in that perspicuity. If such perspicuity is possible, certainly, it

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Historie der philosophischen Lehrmeinungen könne man nicht lernen, was wahr und was falsch ist. Und weil der historische Bericht von dagewesenen Denkweisen keinen Maßstab abgibt für die Entscheidung der einzig wesentlichen Frage, was eine wahre und was eine falsche Meinung ist, bekämpft Decartes die Autorität des Aristoteles in der scholastischen Metaphysik und Physik. Worauf es für das philosophische Wissen-wollen einzig und allein ankommt, ist nicht zu wissen, was andere zu anderen Zeiten über die Natur gedacht und gesagt haben, sondern mit eigenen Augen zu sehen und experimentell zu erforschen, was die Natur selber ist und immer gewesen ist – zur Zeit des Aristoteles nicht anders als zur Zeit des Kopernikus und Galilei" (Löwith 17/18).

[52] "Die Philosophie kann dann nicht mehr einen unbedingten Wahrheitsanspruch stellen, sie muß stattdessen ihre geschichtliche Situation, d.h. die sich jeweils verändernden Antworten auf entsprechend veränderte Fragen übernehmen und sich auf historische 'Besinnung,' 'Verstehen' und 'Deuten' beschränken" (Löwith 15).

[53] We can think here of Descartes rejecting the idea that 'final ends' are to be found in nature, because nature does not *consciously* aim at any such ends - which seems to miss the point, since Aristotle's natural teleology was never meant to suggest a *conscious* striving for ends.

seems, this is not to be obtained *by virtue of* restricting the sources one may appeal to, in developing an interpretation of scripture, to other parts of scripture, having cast aside all other *überlieferte* sources of understanding. Insofar as there is a problem of bondage of the will to sin and ignorance, or a bondage of reason to history, this bondage cannot be overcome by declaring that "was die Natur selber ist und immer gewesen ist" is that which "mit eigenen Augen zu sehen und experimentell zu erforschen [ist]" (Löwith 18), as if there were only one way to understand things, whether that be nature for Descartes or scriptural revelation for Luther; or, if there is one *true* way, as if any progress could be made towards this one way by ignoring (or, what amounts to the same, failing to understand) the history of attempts to elucidate this 'one true way.' One cannot grasp the truth qua correctness of a particular view without first grasping its truth qua unhiddenness, uncoveredness.

Löwith claims, "aus der bloßen Historie der philosophischen Lehrmeinungen könne man nicht lernen, was wahr und was falsch ist" (Löwith 17) – out of the mere history of philosophical doctrines one cannot learn what is true and what is false. However why not say that *aus der bloßen Historie der philosophischen Lehrmeinungen* one certainly learns truth – one uncovers for oneself what has been uncovered by others – the truth, το αληθεια – and this uncovering is required *before* one can say whether what is uncovered, what appears, is true *or* false? In this sense, while *in learning* the mere history of philosophical doctrines one *may* fail to learn which are true and which false, one will *certainly* fail to distinguish between doctrines *without* having in some sense learned their history. One can certainly *resolve* to stand aloof from one's culture and history, to determine what is correct without feeling the need to understand what anyone

else believes or, more importantly here, *has* believed to be correct; but attempting to do so is surely shear vanity of vanities, the groundless apotheosis of my own viewpoint, and failure to recognize my own existential situation. One might, like Hegel, pass *through* history to a comprehension of the totality so that such an apotheosis is, instead of entirely groundless, only rather difficult to believe in;[54] but surely ignoring history is not an option.

If there are truths revealed by a universal light of reason, if there is a *philosophia perennis*, we cannot plausibly deny a *Berufung auf die Geschichte als einer letzten Instanz* (Löwith 16), an appeal to history as a final court of judgment. This is far from suggesting what lacks all plausibility: that every belief that has been held throughout history must be regarded as true; or that every belief that we ourselves hold, or that is generally held in our time or our society, is true; but what we do point out here is that it is no less implausible to think that peoples of other historical periods were entirely cut off from the truth, whether in the sense that nothing was uncovered to their understanding, or in the sense that all of their judgments about what was uncovered were incorrect. It would be quite foolish to insist that only that be called the discovery of universal reason, or the *philosophia perennis*, which had first been discovered by me, *mit eigenen Augen gesehen und experimentell erforscht*. To merit the name universal, this kind of reason must be universally discoverable and insofar as it is supposed to constitute the unchanging *essence* of man, it truths must be actually uncovered and expressed in one way or another throughout the *history* of man. To declare otherwise would rest on the supposition that a great many of the putatively great thinkers which we discover in studying the history of

[54] And it is difficult to believe in, not least, perhaps, because of the difficulty of attaining an adequate grasp of the theoretical dynamics underlying the Hegelian realization of this comprehension.

ideas (all those, namely, whose ideas conflict with our own), thinkers like Aristotle (although admittedly such thinkers do not form a large class), who dedicated enormous effort and talent to expressing the nature of reality in a comprehensive way; such thinkers may have managed to entirely miss the mark in their efforts to uncover the 'everlasting' truth.

Now if it were the case that we *must* see through our *own* eyes, and this *rather than* through the eyes of great thinkers of the past, this would imply *we* must have some way to access truly universal reason that was *lacking* in the past; but if this is so we are left with the awkward task of explaining how this is possible, how it has come about; and the impossible task of explaining how we can claim to know that a thinker like Aristotle did not in fact propose universal truths from which we can learn (and we cannot avoid claiming this – it is a corollary of our initial methodological claim), without understanding what Aristotle thought, which understanding is not possible without appealing to history. If we must be suspicious of the universal validity of *Aristotle's* philosophy, unless we can appeal to some difference in kind between his thought and ours, and not just a prejudice in favor that which is 'modern' (which would be incompatible with the premise of universal reason), we must in fairness be likewise suspicious of whatever 'philosophy' we ourselves come up with. Conversely, if I can trust that the testimony of my own eyes and my own research allows me to discover perennial truths, then there is no apparent reason why Aristotle was not licensed to do the same, and why I should not in turn be able to trust Aristotle's testimony, that is, that I should not be able to appeal to the testimony found in the history of philosophy. Since I have no license for making any of the kinds of stipulations that would guarantee straight

off that my own thought is the true expression of universal reason, by default I must appeal to the history of philosophy to determine whether something deserving the name of perennial philosophy actually exists and whether my claims are in fact in harmony with this tradition. In the end, then, despite certain changes in our questions and our answers, rather than simply rejecting something like a *philosophia perennis*, we ground for ourselves for the first time the possibility of a transcending horizon of understanding; a possibility, as Ricoeur puts it, wherein "la philosophie de l'historicité tente de vaincre l'historicisme du dedans, de retrouver dans l'historique les signes de l'éternité, dans le relatif l'absolu."[55]

[55] ...wherein "the philosophy of historicity seeks to overcome historicism from within, to rediscover in the historical, signs of eternity, in the relative, the absolute" (Ricoeur 26).

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